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**THE ORCUTT GIRLS ; or, One Term at  
the Academy.** By CHARLOTTE M. VAILE.  
315 pages. With five full-page Illustrations  
by FRANK T. MERRILL. Cloth. 12mo.  
\$1.50.

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*In Preparation.*

**SUE ORCUTT.** By CHARLOTTE M. VAILE.  
330 pages. Illustrated. Cloth. 12mo. \$1.50.



# THE ORCUTT GIRLS

OR

## ONE TERM AT THE ACADEMY

BY

*Marion (White).*  
Mrs. CHARLOTTE M. VAILE

ILLUSTRATED BY

FRANK T. MERRILL



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THE ORCUTT GIRLS.



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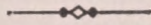
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# THE ORCUTT GIRLS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### AN EXCITING QUESTION.

IT was the first of November, and twilight had stolen in at the windows of the Westville Corset Factory early. Apparently it had come too early to suit the wishes of most of the girls who sat in the long workroom sewing. The wheels of the stitching machines (they had not yet begun to turn by steam) whirled faster as the daylight faded, and the score or more of needlewomen who did the finishing work bent lower over their tasks, with now and then an anxious glance at the darkening windows.

It was not quite an ordinary factory. There were no ignorant, untidy-looking women with faces hardened into an expression of grim endurance, and there were no children aged beyond



their years with a monotonous round of hard work and ill-usage. The occupants of the cleanly, comfortable workroom were a cheerful, intelligent-looking company of girls and women, many of them young and some decidedly pretty and attractive.

The truth was, the corset factory of Westville was a new enterprise, but lately established in the quiet New England village, and had been welcomed by the people as a substantial addition to the industry of the place. Respectable spinsters, who, before the decline of the straw business, had increased their small revenues by weaving palm-leaf into hats, or shaping braid into fashionable bonnets, were glad to employ their idle hours in the work of making corsets, and the daughters of farmers and tradesmen, with no necessity except the longing of energetic young people to help themselves, felt no sense of degradation in employing a portion of their time—often a vacation between terms of school—in a place where their labors brought a substantial return in the shape of actual money.

It was easy to guess that the two young girls who sat at the lower end of the room, their heads



just visible above the pile of work which lay on the table before them, belonged to this latter class, and a keen observer would have surmised with equal readiness that they were sisters. The needle of one of them flew with a steady swiftness, but the other had been sewing for some time with an absent look in her eyes, and it was plain that her thoughts had little connection with the monotonous shapes of gray and white drilling which passed slowly through her hands. She started, and gave herself an impatient little shake, as her energetic companion rose for the third time in the course of an hour and rolled up a bundle of finished work.

“I declare, Bertha,” she exclaimed in a half-exasperated tone, “I don’t see how you can sew as you do this afternoon. That’s the seventh dozen you’ve finished since dinner, isn’t it?”

“The ninth,” replied her sister calmly.

“Oh dear, and this is only my fifth!” sighed the other. “I might as well stop work for to-day. It’s no use trying to sew when you can’t keep your mind on it two minutes at a time.”

“I don’t see why you can’t keep your mind on it,” said Bertha in a judicial tone. “I don’t find it so very difficult.”



“Well,” said the other dejectedly, “perhaps it’s because I have so little mind anyway that one idea seems to take up all the room there is in it. I tell you, Bertha, when I think of all that’s going on to-day, and remember that our fate is hanging in the balance, it’s next to impossible for me to sit here and sew down tapes on these corsets. The only thing in this world that has the slightest interest for me just now is the question whether or not you and I are going to Merton Academy this winter.”

Perhaps the calm industry of Bertha was not really due to a phlegmatic temper. The color rose in her cheeks as her sister spoke, and there was a quiver of excitement at the corners of her soft red lips, but the rate at which her needle flew was, if possible, faster than before.

“It isn’t out of my mind either, Sue,” she said, “and I guess I want to go just as badly as you do; but there’s one thing certain, if we’re going away to school this winter, we’ve got to earn all the money we can beforehand. There’s the tuition, and the books, and the room rent, besides the new clothes we shall need and —”

“Oh, I don’t care if I don’t have any new



clothes," interrupted Sue; "I'd be willing to wear anything for the sake of going. I say, Bertha, let's swap our old cashmere dresses! You don't know where the thin places are in mine, and I don't know where they are in yours. It would be as good as having new ones."

Bertha laughed. "I know where the *spots* are on yours, especially that ink spot on the sleeve. No, thank you, I prefer to keep my own."

"I could put some trimming over the ink spot," said Sue. "'Tisn't very big. However, I won't insist on the exchange, if you can't see the advantages. But really, Bertha, I don't think we shall have to spend much money on clothes, do you? Don't you know, in stories the girls who distinguish themselves at school, and carry off the prizes, always wear shabby dresses, and are laughed at by the others."

"I don't believe the shabby dresses helped them any," said the elder sister discreetly, "and I'm sure it wouldn't be very pleasant to be laughed at."

"No," said Sue reflectively, "unless one knew beforehand that it was part of the story, and that those who laughed would be put to confusion in



the end. I think I could stand it if some good fairy would assure me of that."

"Well," she added, rising, "I've finished this dozen at last. You ought to congratulate me."

"I do most sincerely," said Bertha. She glanced at the work which her sister was tying into a bundle, then suddenly bent over it with an expression of dismay.

"Sue Orcutt!" she exclaimed. "If you aren't the unluckiest girl! I do believe you've hemmed every one of those tapes down on the wrong side."

Sue dropped the string, and clasped her hands with a gesture of despair. "Oh," she groaned, "to think that after all my heroic efforts to keep at work I should make a mistake like that! Bertha, why didn't you look in my direction sooner? You'd have seen it if you had, and stopped me. Well," she continued, in a tone of utter exasperation, "I suppose there's nothing for me to do now but take the work out. I detest sewing tapes! I believe I'll ask to be put onto some other kind of work. I'm sure I could set eyelets without making such blunders."

"I wouldn't advise you to try," said Bertha, who had laid down her own work and was ripping away



at her sister's unlucky stitches. "A machine is a thing that has to be attended to in good earnest, and you'd be sure to put an eyelet through your finger the first time you got to dreaming. I tell you, Sue," she added, feeling that the moment was ripe for a bit of sisterly admonition, "if you could only get over this habit of dreaming, you'd find 'twould be a tremendous saving of time."

"I don't doubt it," said the girl mournfully, "but you see it steals over you before you fairly know it, and it seems as if you couldn't help yourself. Of course, though, you don't understand, for your thoughts never go wandering off like mine. Well, after to-day I mean to turn over a new leaf. If it's only decided that you and I can go to Merton Academy, I shall work like a Trojan, see if I don't."

She settled to her task again, and for the next ten minutes worked with an energy that argued well for her latent powers. Happily, the strain for that day was nearly at an end. A young woman, who had been absent from the workroom for a few minutes and was hurrying back to her place, paused for an instant beside the table.

"Your father has just driven up, girls," she said,



“and he wants to know if you are ready to go home.”

Sue dropped her scissors and started to her feet. “He must have gotten back from Merton,” she said breathlessly. “Now we shall know everything.”

She jerked off the work-apron which covered her plain woollen dress, dropped it onto the pile of unfinished work, and flew to the cloak room without waiting for her sister. Bertha followed more slowly. It was evident that she, too, felt the excitement of the moment, but she laid her own work and her sister's in order, and swept up the shreds and cuttings from the floor with scrupulous care before she left her place. It was one of the regulations of the room which Sue had forgotten.

The latter was seated in the spring wagon beside her father, plying him with questions, when Bertha joined them a few minutes later, but apparently she had not yet learned anything very definite on the all-absorbing topic. Deacon Orcutt was a man who always magnified his office when he was the bearer of important news. He had spent the greater part of the day in the village of Merton, investigating the cost of a term at the academy, and the ways and means by which two frugal young people could



avail themselves of its advantages. It had been a great day, and he did not propose to shorten its story by informing his impetuous daughter all in a breath what the exact outcome of his labors had been. In answer to her hurrying questions, "Can we go, father? Would it cost more than we can possibly afford?" he drew his cheerful countenance into a reflective expression and replied discreetly, "Well, my dear, there are a great many things to be taken into consideration. I've canvassed the ground pretty thoroughly, you may be sure of that; but of course we can't decide on anything positively till we've talked it all over with your mother.

"It's astonishing," he continued, gathering up the reins and giving a "cluck" to his horse, "how it carried me back to old times to be walking about in Merton to-day. It's thirty years since I was a student there, but the old place hasn't changed any to speak of. I saw the very room I had when I boarded at Dr. Taylor's, and I declare it's got the same furniture in it that it had then."

"I presume it rents for a higher price," said Bertha, who had a mind for practical details, and was anxious to side-track her father before he should get fairly off on a train of reminiscence.



"Yes, there's some difference in that respect," admitted the deacon, "but I didn't board myself as you girls are going to do. I was a regular boarder in the doctor's family, and paid so much for everything."

He paused, and Sue pounced upon the admission he had inadvertently made with the eagerness of a hawk swooping down on an unwary chicken.

"Then you did decide that we can go, and we shall board ourselves!" she cried rapturously. "Oh, father, tell us what sort of rooms we're to have, and what kind of people live in the house."

"That depends, my dear, on which rooms we take," said the deacon, finding himself fairly caught. "I didn't say I'd actually engaged any of 'em. We must talk it all over with your mother, you know. But I'll tell you this, there isn't anything there in the shape of rooms to rent that I haven't had my eye on, you can depend on that."

The cheerfulness of his manner went far to supply the assurance he was so careful not to give in words, and Sue settled back with the air of one who felt that she had a right to hope.

"The rooms I liked best of all," pursued the deacon, "were at Mr. Jordan's, up on Fair Street.



There were really three of 'em, a nice little sitting-room with a bran'-new carpet on the floor, and a bed-room, sort of curtained off from it, — I believe they called it an alcove, — and a good-sized kitchen all fitted up for housekeeping, and everything snug and handy."

"Oh, how nice!" cried both the girls, in a breath, and Sue added in her impulsive way, "Why didn't you engage those rooms right on the spot, father? I'm sure they would have suited us exactly."

"So they would, my dear," said the deacon heartily. "They'd have suited you to a T. But the fact is, the price was a little too high. There wasn't another objection in the world, not one; but when they named the figures, I knew in a minute they'd never do for us."

And he named the figures again, the mention of which drew a faint little "Oh-h" from Bertha, and lengthened Sue's face decidedly. It really seemed to her that her father might have spared the description of those charming rooms since they were so obviously out of the question.

The deacon, however, pursued his tale in a tone of unabated cheerfulness. "How-some-ever, I found



some other rooms that suited me just about as well. There wasn't a separate sitting-room, but the kitchen and bedroom were good size, both of 'em, and on the sunny side of the house. The bedroom had a dormer window, and everything looked nice and comfortable. They were at Captain Hoffman's. The captain followed the sea for twenty years, but he's settled down on shore now, and I guess he likes to add a little to his income by renting part of his house."

"Well, I'm sure those were good rooms," said Bertha; and Sue, who had been deeply impressed by the mention of the dormer window, added cordially, "I think we could get along with those beautifully."

"That's what I thought myself," said the deacon approvingly; "that's just the way I looked at it. And I should have taken those rooms then and there, — they didn't come near so high as the others, — but the trouble was they were already engaged. It seems that a couple of young men from Woodstock spoke for 'em a week ago."

Sue gave an exasperated groan now. "Oh, father," she said piteously, "don't tell us any more about the rooms we *can't* have! Did you



find any that were cheap enough for us, and that nobody else had spoken for? It's awful to think you're going to have something, and when you get your mouth fairly open for it, have it jerked away again."

"I don't quite see the force of your figure, my child," said her father mildly.

His imagination was not as lively as hers, and he had not as recently read the story of Tantalus. Then he added in a slightly injured tone, "I thought you'd be interested in hearing about those rooms. I had to look round a good while before I came to the ones I settled on. 'Tisn't my way to begin at the tail end of a story, but if that's what you want, why, I'll try to gratify you."

Sue felt rather ashamed of her burst of impatience.

"Why, you see, pater," she said, sitting closer to him and giving an apologetic little squeeze to his arm, "it depends on how you look at a story which is the 'tail end' of it. Now, to my mind, the very head and front of this story is the question whether you really found any rooms for us, and what they're like. It's tremendously interesting about those other rooms, but I'd rather have that for an after-part."



“All right,” said the deacon, whose forgiving spirit was proof even against a criticism on his methods as a story-teller. “I won’t keep you in suspense a minute longer. I did find some rooms that you girls can have—that is, if your mother approves. Of course we can’t settle on anything without her. They weren’t quite as nice as those others I’ve been telling you about, but taking everything into account, specially the price, I concluded they were the very ones we wanted. They were at Deacon Porter’s. The deacon’s an old man now. He used to take roomers as long ago as when I went to the Academy myself, and I believe he’ll take a friendly interest in you on my account, though he does say I bothered him awfully one term by hanging so many May-baskets to the girls that were rooming there.”

He paused for a moment with a little chuckle, then added, “I don’t know, for my part, how he found out that I did it. I’m sure I never was seen hanging round there after I’d rung the door-bell, but I suppose he made a clever guess at it. I was considered rather a gay young fellow in those days.

“Well, as I was saying, the rooms are at his house; they’re in the ell, over the kitchen and din-



ing-room, sort of attic rooms, you know, with the roof sloping on both sides. However, they're not too low to be comfortable, and the deacon says it's uncommonly easy to warm 'em. That'll be quite a saving in the way of fuel, you know."

He instinctively glanced at Bertha as he added the last remark. It was she who was most likely to appreciate a detail of this kind, and she nodded a quick approval. Sue was eagerly waiting for some detail of more æsthetic interest.

"The kitchen is the larger," continued the deacon, "and I thought that would be your main living-room. There's nothing in it now except the stove, but we can furnish it ourselves. That would be the cheapest way, and it wouldn't be much trouble to take up a little load of furniture. It's a good sized room, and has a closet off from it, and a pantry big enough to do your cooking and wash the dishes in, if you want to."

If he had only mentioned an alcove or a dormer window, it would have had a more exhilarating effect upon the spirits of his younger daughter. Closets and pantries were useful places, no doubt, but they were dreadfully commonplace. Perhaps, however, the charm of these apartments lay outside.



"Did you notice the view from the windows?" she asked rather anxiously.

The deacon bethought himself. "I don't know as I did," he said reflectively; then with a brightening recollection he added, "Oh yes, the long window, that's the one at the end of the kitchen, looks right out towards the woodhouse. I noticed that in particular. It's chuck full of good, dry wood, and the deacon said you could have all you wanted at just what it cost him."

Sue winced in spite of herself, but Bertha responded in a cordial tone, "That's reasonable, I'm sure."

"So 'tis," said her father, "and I think you'll find the deacon a reasonable man every way. He wants things sort of quiet round him, and I don't blame him a mite for that. He said he let the rooms to a couple of boys last winter, who kept up such a racket, and had such a crowd of company all the time that he couldn't stand it. But I told him he wouldn't have any trouble with you girls on that score. If you came to Merton, you'd come to study, and I guessed you wouldn't have much time for foolishness."

"No indeed," said both girls in a breath, and then



Sue asked a little wistfully, "But isn't there anybody except old people in the house?"

"I didn't hear of any young ones," replied her father; "but there's a little black-eyed dressmaker that seems to be pretty much at home there, and from what I saw of her I'll venture to say she's as smart as a steel-trap, and downright good company."

How he discovered this in the minute which, as he said, the little dressmaker spent in flitting through the rooms, did not appear, but the deacon had a penetrating instinct in some directions.

There was a minute's silence, which Sue spent in mentally adjusting herself to the surroundings her father had sketched. They were prosaic enough, yet after the first momentary disappointment she did not find herself wholly depressed. There was a touch of the Bohemian in the girl, and more than a touch of the Yankee genius for making the best of things. She remembered suddenly that attic rooms had been more than once the abiding-place of poets and artists, and that she was rather fond of them herself on gray, dreamy days, when the rain fell softly on the low, sloping roof. Her heart warmed towards those bare little rooms, and the warmth became a positive glow when she thought



of them as the place where she should spend long, blissful hours in study. It was almost a year since she and Bertha had outgrown the district schools of Westville, and to be a student again, busy with the books she loved, this, in itself, would make any place a paradise to her.

It was Bertha who broke the silence by saying to her father, "I suppose you went to the Academy and found out about books and tuition."

"Yes," said the deacon, "I looked into that pretty thoroughly too. In fact, I had a talk with Mr. Hermon himself about your coming. He'll be glad to have you in the school this winter, though I kind of thought 'twould have suited him better if you'd been a couple of boys fitting for Yale or Harvard."

"H'm!" said Bertha, stiffening her neck, and Sue inwardly resolved that she'd show the misguided principal of Merton Academy whether girls were not as desirable as boys, when once she was enrolled among his pupils.

"You see," pursued the deacon, "the Academy's been running down as to numbers of late years, 'all owing to the petty little high schools that are springing up in all the towns around,' as Mr.



Hermon says, and he feels rather sore over it. He told me there was getting to be quite a sentiment, even in Merton, that they'd better turn the old Academy itself into a high school, but he fights that, tooth and nail. He says the school may be small, but they shan't lower the standard in *his* day. It's always had the reputation of giving the best fit for college of any school in the state, and of turning out a splendid set of young people into the bargain. That's the sort of reputation he values, and I guess there's no danger but that the school will keep it, as long as he stands at the head."

"Is he an old man?" asked Sue, beginning to feel a personal interest in the principal of Merton Academy.

"Well, Mr. Hermon must be in the neighborhood of sixty," replied her father. He was himself approaching fifty, and was beginning to be a little careful how he called people old. "He shows his age some, too," he continued, "that is, physically; but, bless you, his mind's as keen as ever. He's a remarkable man, Mr. Hermon is. I suppose he's one of the first classical scholars in the country, and he's more than once had the



offer of a professorship in college. A few years ago he had one at double the salary he has now, but he refused it outright, in fact, wouldn't consider the proposition a minute, and when one of his friends urged the pecuniary consideration, he treated it almost as an insult; said he knew *what* his own work was, and *where* it was, and couldn't conceive what bearing the question of more money had on it one way or another. Oh, he's an unusual character. You'll find *that* out."

The girls were deeply impressed, especially Sue. She felt her heart warm towards the principal of Merton Academy in spite of his ungenerous preference for boys; and while her father and Bertha discussed various matters connected with the renting of rooms and the cost of living in Merton, she occupied herself with imagining his personal appearance. He was tall, she was sure, with a noble head and fine, clear-cut face, though as to the latter, she was not quite decided whether it were of the Grecian or Roman type. His delight in the classics rather suggested the former, but his sturdy standing at his post, in spite of discouragements at home and allurements abroad, inclined her to the latter view. He was scrupulous in his



dress, of course, and most dignified in his manners; in fact, quite "a gentleman of the old school," whatever that phrase might mean. Sue was not exactly clear herself as to its full significance, but she liked the sound of it.

She settled all this as they jogged along the quiet country road, and the square, old-fashioned farmhouse, which was known through all the region round as the "Orcutt place," was reached before she knew it. The door was thrown open by a troop of children, who ranged in size from herself down to a rosy-cheeked counterpart, who could not have been more than six years old. Mrs. Orcutt, a tall, dignified-looking woman, appeared for a moment in the background, sent a swift, comprehensive glance towards the wagon and its occupants, and disappeared again, leaving the children to shout the question on which the interest of the whole family evidently centred.

"Oh, father, father, are the girls going to Merton this winter?"

The deacon checked his horse with a sonorous "*whoa*," and regarded the group in the doorway for a moment with a benignant smile, before he answered, "Well, children, I'm not sure as they're



going, and I'm not sure *but what they're going*" (this last with considerably more emphasis); then he added, as he climbed rather stiffly out of the wagon, "we'll see about it."

The little company were apparently satisfied, and they dispersed with a whoop of delight, leaving the older girls to enter with flushed faces and a sense of unusual importance.

It was indeed an exciting time in that simple country household. There was by no means a superabundance of this world's goods in the hands of the Orcutt family, and the question whether or not two of their number could go away to school, even in the most economical fashion, was felt by all to be a momentous issue. Yet it was by no means the financial part of the problem which lent it its chief interest. A love of knowledge, a recognition that it was, after character, the one thing needful, was ingrained in the family spirit, and there were few things which would not have been cheerfully sacrificed to the getting of a thorough education. The temptation, to which many New England families of a generation ago were liable, of making those sacrifices largely in behalf of the sons, was not felt here, for the six children whose



names had been written in the family Bible were all girls. Bertha, who was eighteen, was the oldest, and Sue, who had just rounded the bend of sweet sixteen, came next.

There was little opportunity before supper for discussing the matter which engrossed all thought. The deacon hurried to the barn to attend to his belated chores, and Mrs. Orcutt busied herself in preparations for the evening meal. She was one who held with Solomon that there was a time for everything, and the time for talking over important subjects was not, in her opinion, when she was occupied with such pressing duties as the making of biscuits and the stirring of "hasty pudding." Her quiet admonition, presently given to the younger girls, "There, children, you needn't ask any more questions now," was sufficient to check their exuberant curiosity, and Sue and Bertha already knew enough of the day's results to be willing to wait a more convenient season for the final decision.

The convenient season came when the chores were finished, the supper dishes washed, and the younger children had been sent to bed. Then, while Mrs. Orcutt occupied herself with the family mending, —



she could not have listened to the most exciting tale with her hands in her lap,—the deacon rendered his complete report, and the plan for one term at Merton Academy was developed in full.

The question of the girls' going had really been settled by the extremely low price of those rooms at Deacon Porter's, and it was felt to be truly providential that such desirable quarters, under the roof of so excellent a man, should have been reserved for them. The furniture to make those rooms habitable was to be taken from the old farmhouse, and the articles which were needed, and could be spared, were decided upon with much deliberation. The supplies for the housekeeping were, of course, to be drawn largely from the home pantry and cellar, and other expenses were to be met from the small income of the farm, and the earnings of the girls themselves in the corset factory.

The last item could not be calculated exactly in advance, and some little debate arose over the amount to be expected from Sue's work in the remaining days, her own glowing opinion of the speed which would be given to her needle by the prospect in store not being fully shared by the others. Bertha, in particular, was sceptical on this point.



"No, Sue," she said, with a shake of her head, "you'll work slower, and sew down more tapes on the wrong side than ever. You'll be dreaming over Merton Academy all the time until we fairly get there."

This was felt by Sue to be rather unkind, but she was in too happy a frame of mind to resent anything. "Oh, Bertha," she said, falling upon her sister's neck, when the conference was fairly over, "I do believe we shall be the happiest girls in the world. To think of being actually away at school for three blessed months, studying the things we love, with the best teachers in the country, and classmates who care as much for study as we do! I know I shall think I'm in heaven all the time."

The deacon rubbed the moisture from his spectacles, and smiled upon his daughters with a look of inexpressible satisfaction. Their pleasure was his; and, for a moment, too, their dream of perfect happiness. But Mrs. Orcutt's deep gray eyes looked into the future with a keener vision.

"You mustn't expect too much, girls," she said earnestly. "It's a great opportunity, and of course you'll appreciate it, but you'll have your trials; there'll be something besides studying to do, if



you're going to keep house for yourselves in any comfortable or suitable way; and sometimes you'll grudge the time it takes, and wish you could be free from it all. Things won't always go right at school, either. Oh, there'll be some hard things to bear, you may depend on that, and you'll know the difference easily enough between Merton Academy and heaven."



## CHAPTER II.

### LEAVING HOME.

THE winter term at Merton Academy was to begin the week after Thanksgiving, and the time which remained before the all-important date was a busy one indeed in the Orcutt family. For a fortnight longer the girls went regularly to the corset factory, and if Sue did not achieve with her needle quite the brilliant results she had hoped, it should be said, in justice to her, that the record was an unusually good one. At home the preparations for their winter outfit went briskly on under their mother's energetic management. There was much to be done, but perhaps the going away would have lost something of its interest and importance if it had not taxed the industry of the family to the utmost. There was a new rag carpet, which had been in making for months, to be finished with haste and given to the weaver; a bed-comfort or two to be tied, and the last rows



added to a braided rug of unusual dimensions. The little girls could help in the braiding, but they were made happier still by being trusted with some parts of the housework not usually given to their hands. Little Meg was allowed to stand on a "cricket" and wash the dishes, and Kit, aged twelve, was promoted to the dignity of making brown bread and johnny-cake, articles which formed no inconsiderable items of the family fare.

For three days during the last week, a dress-maker was employed at the house, and during that exciting period Sue and Bertha each became the possessor of a brand-new dress, a brown cashmere of the best quality. Garnet would perhaps have been more becoming to Sue's dark hair and eyes, and Bertha's delicate complexion would certainly have been set off by a soft shade of blue, but the considerations in favor of getting both gowns alike were too obviously on the side of economy to be overlooked by Mrs. Orcutt, and the girls accepted her decision in the matter with cheerful acquiescence. For the rest, the arranging of their wardrobes was a simple matter. Some furbishing up of old gowns, a little turning and twisting, or the skilful adjusting of a bit of trim-



ming to cover the piecing with which new cloth was added to an old garment, — these were the principal items required, and the stitches were mostly taken by Mrs. Orcutt, whose lamp burned often far into the night.

“No, no,” she said sometimes, when the girls remonstrated, or begged to be at least allowed to sit up and share her labors; “it won’t do for you to go to the Academy all tired out in advance. I’m used to working by lamplight, and can do it without a bit of your help,” to which she usually added so decisive a “good night” that the girls stole off to bed, feeling that further appeal on their part would be useless.

It was something of a trial to good Deacon Orcutt that his part in the work of these busy days was so small, but he comforted himself with the thought that his turn would come later, and meanwhile spent as much time as possible in looking over the stores in the cellar and selecting the choicest of the fruits and vegetables for his daughters’ future use.

“Of course you can buy flour and such things just as well at Merton as you can here,” he said one evening, when, for the fiftieth time, the sub-



ject of supplies was under discussion, "but you wouldn't find any potatoes to match my Peach-blows, or any squashes and pumpkins equal to those that grew in the old south cornfield. Deacon Porter said you could have a corner of his cellar just as well as not, and I mean to fill it up with some vegetables that'll make the old gentleman open his eyes. If he don't wish some of 'em belonged to him, when he sees 'em," he added with a little chuckle, "I'll lose *my* guess."

What reason he had for supposing that his brother deacon would fall so easily into the sin of covetousness did not appear, and his wife intimated, in a rather reproving tone, that the suggestion was not altogether complimentary.

"Well, of course," said the deacon apologetically, "I don't mean to imply that he'll feel the way Ahab did about Naboth's vineyard, or anything of that sort, but he can't help seeing the difference between such vegetables as I raise and what he's in the habit of buying at the store, and I don't know as he'd be held accountable if he did feel a little envious," he added firmly. "Now I think of it, I'm a good mind to take him up a few potatoes or apples, just in the way of a present. I



shall have a pretty good jag of stuff for the girls, but I guess I can manage to tuck in a little something extra."

"It seems to me, father," observed Sue rather impatiently, "that you think we're going to have tremendous appetites when we get to Merton. A body'd think, from the amount of stuff you're planning to take, that we were going to spend the greater part of our time in eating."

The deacon smiled knowingly. "You'll want more 'stuff' than you think now that you will," he said with emphasis. "Young folks are always hollow when they're off at school, and you know you won't have your mother's pantry to go to. I tell you, you'll want a pretty good supply of things in the cellar, specially apples."

"Well, I think myself it would be a good plan to have lots of apples," admitted Sue; "then we should have something to fall back upon, if we were too busy studying, any time, to feel like getting a meal."

The deacon winked sagaciously, and Bertha slightly nodded; but Mrs. Orcutt dropped her sewing into her lap for a moment with an expression of real dismay.



"Now, girls," she said, including them both in a glance of disapproval, "you mustn't think of doing in any such slipshod way as that. It'll be time saved in the long run for you to get every meal properly and take time enough to eat it. It's 'a sound mind in a sound body' that's needed, you know, and you won't have either if you neglect the plain rules of health."

It was a subject on which her views were extremely definite, and she added earnestly, "If there's one thing in this world that a woman needs more than any other, it's good health, and I'd never consent to your going off to school, in the way you're going, if I didn't suppose you'd take proper care of yourselves when you got there."

"Oh, we will, mother, we will," protested both the girls, and Sue added penitently: "We'll get our meals every time as if we expected you to sit down at the table with us when they're ready."

"I wish we'd had more practice in cooking beforehand," said Bertha rather wistfully, "I don't feel as if I knew anything about it independently."

"Well, I wish you had," said her mother with a little sigh, "and I don't know but I'm to blame that you haven't, but I don't see when you could



have taken the time for it lately. However," she added briskly, "I'll write out the receipts for the things you'll mostly need to make, and if you mix in plenty of good sense with every one of 'em, there's no danger but you'll get along all right. That's really what's needed in cooking more than anything else, and I always think it's a downright lack of gumption when a woman can't get up a meal fit to eat. I've no fear but that you'll make a good cook, Bertha, nor you either, Sue, if you only give your mind to it."

"I'll try my best," said Sue humbly. Her feelings were not hurt by the doubt implied in her mother's closing remark. She had in fact heard it too often, it being generally admitted by the family that her mind was of a fairly good order, but somewhat too frequently absent to be depended on with entire confidence.

"And you know," said the deacon, returning to the pleasant contemplation of his own part in furnishing his daughters' table, "I shall be up every few weeks with a good load of things from home. Your mother'll find time to make you up a batch of pies and doughnuts now and then, I guess, and I'll see that you don't run out of ham and good corned beef.



'Tisn't such an awful sight of work to cook 'em, and I guess you'll have plenty of time for studying, and not starve either."

With such labors and plannings the days passed quickly,—dear days, not to be imagined by girls for whom fortune has smoothed the way to an education, and whose going away to school requires only an easy consent on the part of their parents and a few visits on their own part to shops and dress-makers.

The Saturday came at last which was to see our heroines off. The morning was sharp and frosty, as befitted the next day but one after Thanksgiving, but the sky was cloudless; and the girls, well equipped for the journey, felt no dread of the twenty-five miles which lay between home and the village of Merton.

Perhaps it would have detracted from the enjoyment of some young ladies that the spring wagon, in which they were to make the trip, served as a moving-van as well, and conveyed the household goods and provisions with which they were to set up their miniature housekeeping. But neither Sue nor Bertha felt the least mortification on this score. The deacon himself had arranged the load, and, as



he complacently said, everything was "in apple pie order." The plain, light furniture, the box of kitchen utensils, the bags of vegetables, and the barrel of apples were all dextrously packed and bound together, and the effect, if not artistic, was in the highest degree respectable.

At precisely eight o'clock the girls mounted to the seat beside their father. They had said good by to their mother and sisters at the door, but the latter climbed over the wheels and hung upon the sides of the wagon for another and another kiss. It was hard, this last moment, harder than any of them had foreseen. There were tears in all their eyes, and little Meg sobbed outright.

"There, there, children," called Mrs. Orcutt from the door, "don't hinder the girls any longer!"

The children dropped suddenly from the sides of the wagon. The deacon gathered up the reins with a decided "ge dap!" Bertha winked hard for a moment, and Sue swallowed a great lump in her throat. "Good by! good by!" they all called in husky chorus, and then the wagon rolled away with the faces of its occupants set towards Merton.



## CHAPTER III.

### AN INTRODUCTION TO NEW SCENES.

THE good gray horse which the deacon drove that day was no loiterer, and the record she made was an item of the journey which he never failed to mention when he afterwards told the story. It was not yet noon when they reached the village of Merton, and the girls occupied themselves, as they drove down Pine Street, in guessing which of the neat frame dwellings which faced them on either side belonged to Deacon Porter. The question was, however, settled for them, before they had fairly decided, by the appearance of the deacon himself, — a tall, white-haired old gentleman, who suddenly opened the gate before a pleasant-looking house, and stood watching their approach with evident expectation.

“There he is now!” exclaimed Deacon Orcutt, and he conveyed to the gray horse a rather excited wish that she should quicken her pace for the few



remaining rods. The horse responded briskly, and a minute later the two men were shaking hands over the wagon wheel with the heartiest cordiality.

“Well, you see we’ve got here, bag and baggage,” exclaimed Deacon Orcutt, his hearty voice ringing out with a note of peculiar satisfaction. Then, turning to his daughters, he added, “Deacon Porter, these are my girls, the ones that are going to live with you this winter, and I guess you’ll find you’ve got the right sort of roomers this time, if you never had any before.”

Bertha gave her father’s sleeve an admonishing little twitch. A disposition to glow over his girls was the good man’s particular weakness, a weakness which the girls themselves sometimes found a little embarrassing.

“It’ll be for Deacon Porter to say what kind of roomers we are, after he’s tried us,” she said, blushing rosily.

“Oh, I hain’t a doubt on that p’int; not a doubt,” said the old man gallantly. “There is a saying about ministers’ sons and deacons’ daughters being nat’rally a little wild, but I never took much stock in it, specially the last part. The fact is,” he added,



nodding sagaciously at Deacon Orcutt, "it depends a good deal on what sort of a deacon he is."

"That's a fact," said the other, with an expansive smile. "It's pretty sure that there's some fault behind when the children go wrong. 'Train 'em up in the way they should go, and when they're old they won't depart from it' — that's what Solomon said, you know, and I guess he hit it about right."

The girls were getting a little impatient. There were subjects vastly more interesting to them just now than the training of children, or the special tendencies of deacons' daughters.

"We shall get hard sitting here so long," whispered Sue in her father's ear.

He was not as well up in the sayings of Hans Andersen, as in the proverbs of Solomon, but the suggestion had the desired effect. "Feel sort of stiff, do you?" he asked, bestirring himself. "Well, I shouldn't wonder; twenty-five miles is a good deal of a ride on a frosty morning like this. I believe I feel a little that way myself," and he climbed down from the wagon in a manner which betrayed that he, too, had been sitting quite long enough.

"You must come right into the sitting-room," said Deacon Porter, eagerly leading the way as



they moved towards the house together. "Mother's got a good fire in there, ready for you. She said you'd be chilled through, by the time you got here."

"Oh, I don't feel cold," protested Sue; "all I want is to move about a little."

She wanted to go instantly to those upper rooms, and would have done so in spite of the deacon's invitation had it not been for the sweet-faced, motherly woman who met them at the door.

"I'm real glad you've come," she said, giving each of the girls a hand. "I told father you'd be along to-day, though I didn't expect you quite as early as this. Now don't go to your rooms quite yet," she added earnestly, reading Sue's wish in her restless glance; "you'll like these rooms all the better if you don't see them till you're nice and warm."

There was a touch of philosophy in this which appealed even to Sue, and the courtesy of the occasion appealed still more strongly to Bertha. They sat down by the cozy fire, and even sipped a little of the tea which Mrs. Porter insisted on drawing for them; but it was impossible to endure a delay of more than a few moments, and leaving their father to thaw himself out at his leisure, they ex-



cused themselves and ran, with hearts beating ridiculously fast, up the stairs which Mrs. Porter pointed out as leading to their own apartments.

The plain, unvarnished picture which the deacon had drawn of them in advance had left no possible room for disappointment. Indeed, the girls both felt, as they stepped into the low, broad room which was to be kitchen and sitting-room in one, that he had somehow not done it justice. He had not told how the warm, south sunlight brightened the walls, nor mentioned that the window which let in the generous flood was deep and wide, reaching almost to the floor, with a sill broad enough to furnish a comfortable seat to the looker-out.

Sue stepped quickly towards it, shrinking a little at the remembrance of the "woodshed," but forgot it the next instant in the view that lay beyond.

The house was almost on the edge of the town, and sharply behind it rose a hill crowned with dark green pines. There was a picturesque group of rocks on the nearer side, and among them, leaning forward a little, with something alert and eager in its pose, stood a slender white-limbed birch. It seemed almost to be looking in at the sunny win-



dow, and the heart of the impulsive, imaginative girl, thrilling with the happiness of the moment, went out to it with a swift understanding. It was a sentinel, she said to herself, a kindly sentinel, keeping watch for all its dark-robed fellows, over the occupants of that room, and welcoming them now with the quiver of its delicate branches. How many glad newcomers it must have welcomed to that room before! Did it know, she wondered, what the coming meant to *her*? It should see, ah, it should see, such faithful work, such happy days, as never had been known between these walls before!

She started suddenly at the touch of her sister's hand on her arm. Bertha, too, was standing by the window, taking the measure with her careful, practical eye, for the muslin curtains which were to be drawn across the lower sash.

That was a busy afternoon for the girls and their father. The deacon had no intention of starting for home till he had seen them, as he said, fairly settled, and the girls themselves were eager to send a report to their mother of housekeeping well begun. By sunset the new rag carpet was down, every article of furniture was in its place, the curtains were



at the window, and the cellar and pantry had each been furnished with its appropriate store.

The filling of the wood-box (which, by the way, was no ordinary wood-box, but a knowing affair, upholstered in creton with a cushion on the top) was positively the last service which the deacon could render his daughters, and he heaved a deep sigh as he threw down the final armful. "I wish I could fill it for you to-morrow, girls," he said; "I shall think of you when I'm bringing in the wood for your mother."

"Well, if you do," said Sue, her voice choking a little, "please remember that we girls have good strong arms and are perfectly able to do it for ourselves."

She made a practical demonstration of the fact by giving him, as she spoke, a ferocious hug; then she added decidedly, "You've done everything in the world to make us comfortable, father, and now if we can't get along by ourselves, we're poor sticks and don't deserve a bit of sympathy."

"I don't know but that's about so," said the deacon frankly; "but you're not poor sticks, and you *will* get along in tip-top fashion."

"Well, I must be getting off; I guess Penny"



—he referred to the pretty gray horse, whose name was Penelope — “is rested by this time, and we must be taking the road if we mean to get home by moonlight. She won’t make the trip quite as quick as she did this morning.”

“We’ll have supper for you in ten minutes, father,” said Bertha. She opened the door of the oven as she spoke and disclosed a row of great, mealy-looking potatoes growing beautifully brown, then added, with quite the air of an old housekeeper, “You must have something hot before you start, you know.”

The deacon gave an approving chuckle. “That’s the way I knew you’d do things,” he said, and he made a note of the incident to report to Mrs. Orcutt on his return.

Three-quarters of an hour later he was gone, and the girls were left in their place alone. The supper dishes had been despatched quickly, and the work of the day was fairly done.

“Don’t let’s light the lamp quite yet,” said Sue, drawing her chair before the stove, and opening the front doors, which transformed it from a prosaic instrument for cooking into a miniature fireplace. “Let’s sit here in the dusk awhile and try



to realize that we've actually gone away to school. Oh Bertha, doesn't it seem too good to be true?"

"Yes, it does," said Bertha solemnly; "and yet," she added, "somehow it doesn't seem half as queer to be here as I thought it would."

She did not insist on lighting the lamp, but she had her own scheme for utilizing the twilight, and she said, a minute later, as she placed her chair closer to her sister's, "Sue, don't you think 'twould be a good plan to divide off the work to-night, and decide just what part each of us shall do? That would be the systematic way, and would save all confusion."

It was possible that the details of housework would not, after all, prove very fascinating to Sue. "Oh," she said, with a little sigh, "must we do that right now?"

She would probably have yielded to her sister's proposal, however, had there not come at that moment a sound of steps on the stairs. The stairs (it should perhaps be mentioned), with a narrow entry, lay between the two rooms. Some one was evidently coming up to their quarters, and a moment later there was a brisk knock at the door.

The girls had not yet learned to answer a caller



with a careless "come in," and Bertha opened the door at once to a petite young woman, with a work-bag on her arm, who smiled at them from across the threshold with an air of the utmost friendliness.

"It must be the little dressmaker," thought Sue, with a quick remembrance of her father's first visit; and the newcomer confirmed the impression, by introducing herself as such, without delay.

"I don't suppose you were expecting a caller," she said in a peculiarly pleasant voice, "but I'm Mollie Graham, the dressmaker. I live here, you know,—that is, I spend my nights here,—and my bedroom is right next to yours, so I thought I wouldn't stand on ceremony about getting acquainted. May I come in a few minutes?"

The cordiality with which both girls assured her of the pleasure it would give them, left no doubt of their willingness to make her acquaintance, and she took the low chair which Bertha placed beside the other two, with the manner of one who already felt herself quite at home.

"No, don't light the lamp," she said, as Bertha turned a second time to perform that service; "I like to sit in the dark. It's the only time when



I feel as if I really had a right to be idle. Besides, it's pleasant when one has a cozy fire like this."

Sue felt that there was at least one point in common between herself and the little dressmaker. "That's what I think," she said quickly. "I was just telling Bertha, before you came in, that there was no need of a lamp."

"Not a bit," said the other, leaning comfortably back in her chair. "There's plenty of light to make out each other's faces by, and that's all that's needed. I'm sure you can see that I'm a homely little old maid, and I can tell plainly enough that you're a pair of awfully nice young girls, younger than I was a dozen years ago. I'm not absolutely sure which is the older, but *you're* the head of the house," she added with a merry nod at Bertha.

Sue laughed. "That's right," she said; "Bertha's the unmistakable head, and I'm only Sue, but I don't see how you found it out so soon."

"My dear," said the little dressmaker,—she had the easiest, most friendly manner imaginable,—“when you've been about among people, all sorts and conditions of 'em, as I have for more than



thirty years, you can tell something about 'em too, even in the dark."

She spent a minute sending a quick, bright glance about the room, then exclaimed with a note of genuine admiration in her voice, "Well, I don't see but you look as thoroughly settled as if you'd been living here for a month; and how nice you are, with your pretty new carpet, your braided rugs, and all the other fixings! I've been in and out of this room a good deal in the course of my life, but I must say I never saw it look as nice as this before, *never*."

It would have been impossible for the girls to take offence at the frank interest with which she surveyed their small dominion. The perfect friendliness beneath was too apparent. Besides, they had all the pride of young housekeepers in their first belongings, and were not unwilling to have a visitor admire.

"I shall tell the folks at home what you said, when I write," said Bertha; and then she positively could not refrain from lighting the lamp, and giving their caller a peep at the bedroom, with the pretty home-made dresser draped in chintz, the "half-moon" table, and the "sleepy



hollow" chair, all of which Miss Graham admired with the knowing admiration of one who had no small amount of Yankee ingenuity herself.

When they had returned to the parlor (as Miss Graham declared the kitchen should be called, at least in the evening), Sue, who was really getting a little tired of housewifery, suddenly changed the subject.

"Have you known many of the girls who've roomed here before?" she asked.

"Well, I guess I've known most of them for the last ten years," replied Miss Graham. "I've had a pretty good chance, going in and out as I do. Besides, the girls are generally homesick for the first few weeks, and I've considered it part of my mission in life to cheer them up a little."

"I don't see why they should be homesick," said Bertha gravely.

"Don't you?" said Miss Graham, with a little smile. "Perhaps you'll find out one of these days; girls at school generally do."

"Not when they've wanted to go as much as we have, I hope," said Sue.

"Well, perhaps not," said the little dressmaker; "but homesickness is a queer sort of distemper,



and it's catching among girls at school. You can't tell when it's coming, nor who'll come down with it next. I remember what a siege one girl had with it here. She couldn't eat, and she wouldn't study, and she was in doleful dumps over everything. Dear me, I used to think Giant Despair had gotten hold of this room for his particular dungeon, but I used to come in as often as I could and try to stand between the poor girl and destruction."

"I think I should have been inclined to let the old giant cudgel her all he had a mind to, if she couldn't bestir herself a little to get out of his way," said Sue scornfully.

Miss Graham's eyes twinkled. "Ah, my dear young lady," she said, "just wait till you've fallen into his clutches yourself some day. He's a crafty old fellow, Giant Despair, and most of us are doomed to have a bout with him sooner or later. However, I really don't believe you girls are the homesick kind, and if it touches you at all, probably it won't strike in."

Perhaps she found the atmosphere of the room unusually agreeable, for she sat there more than an hour, telling stories and answering questions



about the Academy; while the girls, for their part, disclosed their own plans and longings, and gave more than one unconscious glimpse of the dear, self-sacrificing home they had left behind.

She started suddenly when the clock on the wall struck eight. "Dear me!" she said, "I didn't mean to stay so long. Girls who have ridden twenty-five miles, and set up housekeeping all in one day, must be tired, I should think. I shall look in on you now and then, and if" — she hesitated a moment and sent a laughing glance towards Sue — "if you *should* get blue, or anything, just let me know."

"No, I shall keep it to myself," said Sue, and then she asked suddenly, "Don't you ever get blue or anything yourself?"

The little dressmaker settled back in her chair for a moment longer, and let her hands drop into her lap. "Oh, my dear young creature," she said, "if you knew how many funny, fussy, fidgety women there are in this world, and how hard it is to work for some of them, you wouldn't ask a dressmaker that question. If there's one thing in particular that I thank the Lord for it's Saturday night. I should have died a thousand deaths before



this if it hadn't come just in time to save me from being all fagged out."

"Well," said Sue impulsively, "'Turn about is fair play,' and if you've had the business of cheering up the girls in this room all these years, I think there ought to be a change. The next time you feel tired and sort of down-hearted, just come in here and see what we girls can do in the way of making things jolly."

"Bless you!" said Miss Graham, with an odd little quaver in her voice, and then she rose with the air of one who felt that it was positively time to be gone. "Good night," she said at the door; "don't forget that my room is right next to yours."

"Good night," responded the girls in concert.

"I know I shall like her," said Bertha, when the door had closed.

"I'm in love with her already," said Sue; and then she added with a sigh of satisfaction, "Oh, Bertha, doesn't it seem as if things had really begun?"



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FIRST GLIMPSE OF MERTON ACADEMY.

THE atmosphere of Deacon Porter's house was peaceful at all times, and the coming of the Sabbath scarcely increased its quiet. Perhaps, indeed, the presence of Mary Graham with her quick step and occasional ripple of laughter more than counterbalanced the added gravity of the good deacon and his wife. The latter made an early call at the girls' door and informed them of the hour for church service, adding that they would be more than welcome to occupy seats in the family pew.

"We want you to feel that you belong to the family, you know," she said with one of her motherly smiles. "Father always hires a whole pew for the sake of the young folks that room here, and he'll be glad to introduce you to the minister and the other deacons after meeting."

Possibly the girls would have been willing to dispense with this last attention, but they gratefully









"A CONSIDERABLE CONGREGATION HAD GATHERED IN THE AUDIENCE ROOM OF THE SQUARE, OLD-FASHIONED CHURCH."



accepted the offered seats and set off with the family, promptly, at the ringing of the first bell.

“Could we go by the Academy on the way?” whispered Sue to the little dressmaker as they passed out at the gate. “It seems as if I couldn’t wait till to-morrow to see it.”

Miss Graham smiled. “Yes, we could,” she said; “it would be only three or four blocks out of our way.”

But the last clause had settled it. That detour of three or four blocks would have been “a walk for pleasure, pure, unmistakable pleasure,” as the girls said afterwards to each other, and no member of the Orcutt family had ever dissipated in that way on the Sabbath.

A considerable congregation had gathered in the audience room of the square, old-fashioned church when they entered, and the girls were not wrong in guessing that most of the young people whom they saw scattered about the room, were, like themselves, about to become students at the Academy. The minister had evidently counted on having a number of them in his audience, and his somewhat remarkable discourse was addressed especially to them. He had chosen as his text, “And thou,



Capernaum, which are exalted unto Heaven, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." But the Capernaum of his thoughts was by no means the ancient town on the Sea of Galilee. It was, instead, the village of Merton, and the young people who enjoyed the privileges of its ancient and honorable Academy were the favored ones who might well expect to reap loss and sorrow if they failed to improve their opportunities.

A couple of jovial-looking boys, in the rear of the church, who would doubtless have done well to lay the discourse to heart, laughed and whispered behind a hymn book as the preacher poured forth the words of counsel and warning; but the two girls who sat in Deacon Porter's pew listened with bated breath. It seemed to them both that the sermon must have been designed especially for them.

They said as much to Miss Graham on the way home, but the little dressmaker failed to see the discourse in the light of a special providence for her young friends.

"You didn't need it a speck," she said decidedly. "For my part, I've noticed that the ones who do need that sort of a sermon never take it to them-



selves at all, and I should think ministers would know it. If I'd been preaching to you two," she added with a little smile, "I'd have taken a good round promise instead of a threatening, anyhow."

It always seemed to Sue and Bertha as if that particular Sunday had more hours in it than any other that they ever knew, but it passed at last, and the longed-for Monday actually arrived. The regular work of the term at Merton Academy did not begin till the following day, but it was expected that students would report to the principal to have their studies arranged and all preliminary matters despatched as far as possible. Ten o'clock was the hour set for meeting Mr. Hermon, and promptly at the moment the girls marched up the old stone steps leading to the Academy.

It stood a little higher than the street, from which it was shut off by a thick, evergreen hedge, on a wide lawn of its own, dotted with splendid old trees. The building itself was a large white frame, with a square dignified centre fronted by a tall portico, and benevolent-looking wings extending broadly on either side. For a temple of learning it was really a quite homelike and cheerful-looking place, but the girls approached it with



a feeling akin to awe, and their hearts beat ridiculously fast as they stepped across the threshold. The stream of students which they had expected to see pouring in had not yet begun. Apparently they were themselves the first comers.

A young fellow in the hall, who might be a student, and was evidently acting as janitor, answered the question as to where they should find the principal's office, and a moment later they found themselves in the presence of the great man himself.

He was seated at his desk, and so engrossed in a book which lay open before him, that for a moment he did not observe them, and it was well for Sue at least that she had that moment in which to recover from her surprise, almost dismay, at his appearance. If she had ever read Boswell's life of Samuel Johnson, she would have known that it was possible for a man of the highest scholarship, and most distinguished character, to present an unpleasing, and even a grotesque appearance; but she had yet to make the acquaintance of that delightful biography, and Mr. Theophilus Hermon was so totally different from the elegant, dignified gentleman whom she



had pictured to herself as the principal of Merton Academy, that she caught her breath with a quick, involuntary gasp.

He was large and heavy. The hero of Boswell could hardly have exceeded him in avoirdupois, and his face, though not marked like that of the former, with the ravages of disease, was so furrowed with the lines of care and thought, and so strikingly, so extraordinarily homely, as to seem at first glance almost repulsive. His dress was careless even to the point of disorder. His loose, ill-fitting coat had shoved itself into great wrinkles across his stooping shoulders, and the band of his cravat was conspicuously on the edge of his collar. The hand which lay on the desk was framed in a considerable expanse of white, well-polished cuff, but the one which hung at his side gave no sign of having such an adjunct at all.

All these things Sue noted, in that first minute, while she stood waiting before the desk. Possibly he felt the influence of her startled, wondering eyes. He looked up suddenly, and the expression which she had inwardly pronounced dull became alert, and almost painfully keen.

“Ah, young ladies, you are the first comers,” he



said. Then, motioning them to seats, he added, "I presume you wish to enter the Academy."

His voice, which was peculiarly deep, had little animation. He spoke like one engaged simply in a routine of ordinary work.

"Yes, sir," said Bertha, and she added, rather nervously, "We are Deacon Orcutt's daughters from Westville. He had a talk with you a few weeks ago about our coming."

Apparently, the interview was not very fresh in Mr. Hermon's memory. He knit his forehead for a moment as if trying to recall it, and Sue said to herself, with a little inward fierceness, "Probably he forgot all about us because we're only girls."

"Well, I'm glad you've come," he said after a moment; and then he inquired what arrangements they had made for a boarding-place, and gave a short, quick nod, which Bertha at least interpreted as one of approbation, when he learned that they were to board themselves at Deacon Porter's.

"And now," he said, after noting their names in the book on his desk, "the important thing is to arrange your studies. Have you any idea what you want to take?"

The form of the question somehow irritated Sue.



Had she "any idea"? As if it had not been the theme of her meditation by day and by night!

"Oh, we know exactly," she said eagerly; "I want to study Latin, and history and literature, and —"

"Three studies are enough," interrupted the principal rather sternly. "No ordinary scholar can do justice to more than that number, and I should advise that one, at least, be in the line of science or mathematics. Chemistry, now," he continued, his manner warming a little, "that's a very important study, and I intend to make a specialty of it this winter. We have the best laboratory in the State, outside of the colleges, and an old graduate has just presented us with some new and remarkably fine apparatus." He seized a pencil, and added, as if the matter were quite decided, "I think I had better put both of you down for chemistry."

"But we don't *want* to take chemistry!" gasped Sue, beginning to feel positively frightened.

Mr. Hermon bent his eyes upon her with a sudden frown. "Young lady," he said severely, "I trust you will learn to be more discriminating in your use of words before you have been long at Merton Academy. You *do* 'want' to take it!



*Every* young person wants to take it. A good knowledge of chemistry is useful in every employment of life. You simply don't *wish* to take it."

He drew up his heavy under jaw with a peculiar snap as he said the last words, then, after a moment's pause, added solemnly, yet evidently not speaking to the little audience before him:

"Not what we wish, but what we want,  
Oh, let thy grace supply!"

Sue was quite overpowered. A nice use of words was a point on which she had always rather prided herself, but the principal of Merton Academy had apparently caught her in an error, and the quotation, with which he had clinched his criticism, was, to say the least, decidedly in point. She remembered indistinctly that she had seen it somewhere in the hymn book.

"I think we had better take chemistry," said Bertha in a low voice, and Sue ventured no further objection. She looked on, in a dazed sort of way, while Mr. Hermon booked them both as members in the class in chemistry.

She recovered herself, however, a minute later, when he turned towards her with a brisk, "And



now about the other studies. I believe you mentioned Latin."

"Yes, sir," she said promptly, "I want to study Latin — that is" (she caught herself hastily), "I *wish* to study it more than anything else."

Mr. Hermon smiled for the first time, and the effect on his massive face was decidedly illuminating. "Well, I hope we shall be able to accommodate you," he said. "Let me see, beside the classes in the reader we shall probably have only two this term, one in Cicero and one in Virgil."

Sue caught her breath. She knew perfectly that either of the latter classes was far beyond the point to which her own study had taken her, but she had finished the reader, and the idea of going over any part of the ground which she had already passed was intolerable. She hesitated a moment, then said quickly, "If you please, I should like to be in the Cicero class."

"I suppose you have read a sufficient amount of Cæsar, or Sallust?" said Mr. Hermon.

The color flew from Sue's cheeks, and her heart seemed almost to stop beating. But fortune, who is said to favor the bold, certainly came to aid her at that moment. Before she could command her



voice to tell him that she had never read a line of either, the door was flung open, and a rather handsome, merry-looking boy of about her own age burst into the room, at the sight of whom Mr. Hermon seemed suddenly to become quite oblivious of herself and Bertha.

The newcomer was evidently not a new scholar at the Academy, and if he had ever entertained a feeling of awe for its distinguished principal, it was clear that he had quite outgrown it. His greeting to a comrade could not have been more unconstrained, and the manner in which Mr. Hermon returned it was fairly affectionate in its warmth and cordiality.

“Well, Dick,” he said, after a vigorous handshaking, “you’re back in season for once; it’s a good sign, sir, a good sign, and I’m glad to see it.”

“Why, I fairly tore myself away to get here,” said the boy. “My sister had an awfully jolly scheme on foot for to-night, but I told her she must count me out. Merton Academy expected every man to do his duty, and I proposed to be on deck when the firing began!”

“Excellent, Dick, excellent!” said the principal,



smiling, and then he added earnestly, "I really hope you've come to study, this term, my boy."

"Can you imagine my coming for anything else, sir?" said the youth, throwing an accent of wounded innocence into his voice.

The smile on the principal's face broadened. "Ah, Dick," he said, with a shake of his head, "you're a sad joker." Then, in a tone which had a touch of real tenderness in it, he added, "But there's a certain good-nature about you, Dick, and I'll never believe that you'd let me come to such grief in my old age as to fail in fitting the son of the best friend I ever had for the old college. That would go hard with me, Dick, and I don't dare to think what 'twould be to him. He was the finest scholar in our class—"

"After yourself, sir," interrupted the boy gallantly. "I've heard my father say a hundred times that you stood up above the rest of them like Ajax among the Greeks; that you were the Hector of the class, in fact—"

"That'll do, Dick! that'll do!" said Mr. Hermon, throwing back his head with a smile that was broader than before. "I see you remember enough of your Greek to turn a compliment. But



your father is too modest by half. It's a trait of his which you didn't inherit, my dear boy; that, nor his extraordinary capacity for hard work. If you only had!"

"Well, I'm going to buckle right down to business, this term," said the boy gayly; "see if I don't." Then, as if fearing that the occasion might be utilized for a little further admonition, he added hastily, "You must excuse me, Mr. Hermon, for interrupting you. I ought not to have burst in this way, but I felt as if I couldn't wait to see you. I just came in on the train, and I really didn't expect to find anybody here quite so early."

He backed himself towards the door as he spoke, and the apologetic little bow, with which he disappeared the next instant, was evidently meant for the girls as well as Mr. Hermon.

Sue had had time now to collect her thoughts, and summon up her courage. She determined to make a full statement of the amount of Latin she had studied, and follow it with a desperate appeal for the privilege of entering the Cicero class. To her surprise, however, she was spared the effort. Mr. Hermon had apparently forgotten the question with which the conversation had been left.



"Let me see," he said, turning to her, "we had settled on the chemistry, and as for the Latin, I believe you said you were ready for Cicero."

Sue was so totally unprepared for the turn the question had taken that, for a moment, she really could not speak, and in the next, Mr. Hermon was saying decisively, "Very well; we read the orations this term, and shall begin with the poet Archias."

There was a moment in which her conscience whispered that she ought to speak out, and tell him how the case really stood; that it would be wiser and safer. But it passed, and almost before she knew it, Mr. Hermon was making arrangements for the other studies with a briskness which seemed to leave no space for turning back. Bertha, who was fond of mathematics, was assured of the opportunity for entering a class in advanced algebra, and the study of English literature was readily permitted to both. By this time, several other students had entered the room, and the girls, feeling that their business with the principal was ended, yielded their places and withdrew.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE BEGINNING OF A STRUGGLE.

WHEN they were fairly outside the door Sue gave Bertha's arm a nervous little clutch.

"Bertha," she whispered, "was it wicked for me to let him think I was ready for Cicero? I didn't *say* so. I had made up my mind to tell him the exact truth, but he didn't give me a chance."

Bertha looked rather troubled. Her ideas of truth-telling were not of an elastic sort. "I don't know, Sue," she said, hesitating a little; "I wish he hadn't put it just the way he did. It made it seem a little as if you were deceiving him."

"But it wasn't my fault the way he put it," protested Sue, roused now to her own defence. "I didn't say anything of the kind, and I don't see as I was bound to correct his mistakes. It would have been unbearable," she added piteously, "to have had to go over the ground I've already studied, when we can only be here one term."



“I know it,” said Bertha, “but perhaps, if you had told him just how it was, he would have made another class especially for you.”

“Oh, do you suppose he would?” cried Sue, with something like remorse in her voice, and then she added, “But I don’t believe it, and any way it’s a great deal nicer to be in a class with others.”

They had passed out of the building now, but at the steps which led down to the street they lingered a little, to take a more deliberate view of the Academy than they had ventured to give it on entering. Suddenly the word “Library” over a door in one of the long projecting wings caught Sue’s eye, and she made an involuntary movement of return.

“Oh Bertha,” she exclaimed, “let’s go back and take a look at the library! I believe the door’s ajar this minute, and I should so like to see how many books there are.”

Perhaps Bertha would rather have deferred the visit till another time. The purchase of the new school books was just now the matter nearest her heart, but she turned back with her sister, and together, a minute later, they entered the room



which had been set apart for the library of Merton Academy.

They did not know then — how should they? — that this library, originally the gift of Mr. Hermon, and to whose increase a large part of his salary had been devoted for many years, was really a most notable collection, scarcely to be matched outside of the great cities, but they thought of the fifty odd volumes in the old red bookcase at home, and the rows upon rows of books which suddenly met their eyes, lining the walls from floor to ceiling, amazed and overwhelmed them. There was no need for them to read the placard on the wall, admonishing that all conversations must be held in whispers; they would as soon have thought of talking out loud in church.

“Oh Bertha,” Sue murmured at last, with the tears rushing into her eyes, “what *must* it be to have whole hours to one’s self in a place like this?”

She wandered breathlessly about among the books, the color coming and going in her face, her eyes sparkling now and then at the sight of some familiar title, but more often grave with wonder over the many, many that were strange. She passed her



hand caressingly over the backs of the closely set volumes, and if she had been alone would have taken some of them in her arms and laid her cheek against their covers. It was an epoch in her life, an hour never to be forgotten, this first coming into relation with a really noble library.

It was Bertha of course who presently remembered that they could not dwell there always. "We'd better come away," she whispered; "there are the school books to be bought, you know, and other things to be attended to."

Sue drew a long, deep breath, sent a last, devouring look about the room, and then resolutely turned her back. There undoubtedly *were* duties waiting outside, and the sooner they were disposed of, the sooner one could return.

By this time quite a number of students had gathered about the main entrance to the Academy, and the girls, glancing at them furtively as they passed, fancied they could tell by the timid, anxious expression on some faces, who were newcomers like themselves.

"I wonder if we looked half-scared, too, when we went in," said Bertha, as they passed down again to the street.



“I think I must have looked three-quarters so, when Mr. Hermon asked me about the Latin,” said Sue. Her spirits had revived wonderfully during those few minutes in the library, and she added in a tone of positive glee, “Wasn’t it a special providence though, that boy coming in as he did? Another minute and I should have been lost. He was an angel in disguise and nothing short of it.”

Bertha was scarcely prepared for this sudden change in her sister’s mental attitude, from that of a rather conscience-smitten young person to one who felt herself the object of Heaven’s special favor; but she wisely forebore to act the part of monitor. She herself had not been very favorably impressed with the boy.

“I don’t believe he’s much of a scholar, from what Mr. Hermon said,” she remarked soberly, “and I must say he struck me as rather trifling.”

“Well, he did me a good turn, I’m sure of that,” said Sue; and then she added, shaking her fist under the cape of her cloak, “I tell you one thing, Bertha, Mr. Hermon shall never know but that I’ve studied as much Latin as the rest of the class. I’ll read that Cicero as well as the best of them. You see if I don’t!”



The necessary text-books were readily found at the main bookstore of the village, and it was well for the girls' slender purse that two of them could be used in common. Sue grumbled a little at the dollar and a half which was spent for the chemistry, but the possession of a brand-new Cicero, and a second-hand Lexicon not much the worse for wear, which she had luckily found, would have reconciled her to almost anything. She hugged them close as she hurried back to the rooms, and could scarcely wait for lunch to be over before beginning on the poet Archias.

And now came the tug of war. Sue had known perfectly well that hard work, and plenty of it, was before her when she begged the privilege of entering a class so far beyond the point to which her own study had taken her; but she had not realized, she could not realize in her ignorant courage, what it would actually mean for one whose study of Latin had been, for the most part, without a teacher, and whose extent of progress had only been the completion of Andrews' Latin Reader, to plunge at once into the most ornate of the orations of the great Roman. In vain she brought her utmost energy to the work. In vain she supplemented her small



stock of knowledge with a larger store of ingenuity, and a patience which seemed inexhaustible. Both thought and construction, in that first bewildering passage, seemed utterly to elude her.

It was certainly fortunate for her that in the division of labor which, thanks to Bertha's persistence, had been effected, the latter acted as cook for the first week. They would surely have been obliged to eat a cold dinner that day had the preparing of the meal devolved on Sue. Hour after hour she sat with her books by the window, and when the afternoon light was fairly fading she was poring over them still, wrapped in utter oblivion of everything else. When at last Bertha, who had repeatedly called her name without getting any response, laid both her hands across the open page of her Cicero, and begged to know how she was succeeding, she looked up with an expression bordering on desperation.

"How am I succeeding?" she repeated. "Why, I'm not succeeding at all! I haven't read ten lines of it. I haven't gotten hold of anything clearly except this, 'If there is anything of ability in me, oh Romans, and I know how little it is —'"



She laughed almost hysterically, and added, "That hits my own case exactly, and I'm sure it must be right, only I'm beginning to think I haven't any ability at all, that I'm an idiot, a downright idiot, and have come to Merton Academy for the express purpose of finding it out."

The look in her eyes was so tragic, and her tone so expressive of the intense strain under which she was working, that Bertha was really alarmed.

"Oh Sue," she cried, "don't try to take Cicero! I knew it was too hard, all the time. You're not ready for it — not half ready. Nobody could read it with so little preparation as you've had, and it's useless to try." She hesitated a moment, and added, "Of course we've bought the book, but it's perfectly new, and I'm sure they'd take it back again."

For answer Sue sprang suddenly to her feet. Writing-materials were on the table within reach of her hand, and without a word she plunged a pen into a bottle of ink.

Bertha felt that a crisis was at hand, and held her breath, while her sister turned to the fly-leaf of the book and wrote in bold, black letters across the whiteness of the page, "Susan Elizabeth Orcutt, Merton Academy, December 1st, 1870."



“There!” she cried, turning to her sister, with the look Cortez might have had when he ordered the burning of his ships, “do you think they’ll take it back *now*? I tell you, Bertha Orcutt, I’ve made up my mind to be in that Cicero class. It’s between me and this lesson, and if I’m beaten I’ll go back to Westville to-morrow, and ask for my old place in the corset factory.”

Bertha could not speak, but the pride and affection which flashed in her eyes at that moment were more than Sue could bear. She turned her back suddenly, and for a few minutes stood with her face to the window, looking silently out.

Through the soft, gathering shadows the lithe, white birch tree on the hill stood leaning forward, seemingly more intent than ever on its view of that chamber window. Sue saw it, and for an instant her lips moved; then her face gathered itself into an expression of determination more intense than before, and she bent again over her books.



## CHAPTER VI.

### SUE BECOMES A MEMBER OF THE CICERO CLASS.

AT nine o'clock Sue Orcutt had undoubtedly mastered the first ten lines of the poet Archias. It had not been all a question of translation. She was not the kind of scholar who could call a lesson learned while any doubt remained as to constructions, or any question as to rules and reasons, and long after she had caught the meaning of those baffling lines she studied on, her ardor only sharpened for the difficulties that remained. Happily for her she did not guess how small a part of the first lesson those desperately acquired lines would form. She fancied, when at last she closed the book, that one day's work, at least, had been prepared in advance, and with this much of vantage she believed she should be able to hold her own in the struggle whose difficulties she no longer underrated.

"It'll be a tremendous pull for a while," she said to Bertha, whose sense of relief in the final



victory was almost as great as her own, "and of course I shall have to slight the other studies at first; but I'll make up for that by and by. It's lucky for me that Mr. Hermon didn't let me take four studies, as I wanted to. Dear me, I'm not half as smart as I thought I was."

She felt decidedly humble, and the memory of the boast she had made so easily that morning brought a faint little flush to her cheeks, victor though she was in the hard-fought battle.

"Let not him that putteth on the harness boast as him that putteth it off." The wise old saying of the king of Israel came to her remembrance, and with it a dawning perception of the truth that the person who defers his boasting till he has earned the right will have small inclination for boasting at all.

The ringing of the Academy bell the next morning was a welcome sound, and the girls took their way to school with less anxious faces than on the previous day, though Sue declared it was only the feeling of the books in her hand that gave her the added courage. Otherwise she was sure she would have quaked more than before at the thought of meeting Mr. Hermon.



In the large chair on the chapel platform, among his corps of teachers, he looked more impressive than behind his desk, and it was plain that he had taken more pains with his dress than he had the day before. But it was not till he read the scripture for the morning, that marvellous chapter of Job, on the finding of wisdom, that the girls lost the sense of something almost uncouth in his personal appearance, and perhaps this was due to the power with which his deep voice led them wholly away from the thought of himself to the thought of the inspired writer.

The arrangement of the term's work had been thoroughly effected the day before, and the schedule of classes was read at the close of the exercise. Fortunately for Sue, who really could not put her mind on anything but the Cicero, that study was appointed for the first hour, and, as she had expected, Mr. Hermon himself was the teacher. The office of yesterday was the place of recitation, and her heart beat fast as she stepped a second time across the threshold. To her surprise she found herself the only girl among the dozen or more pupils who were there before her. They stared a little as she entered, and she dropped her eyes



with a conscious blush as she took the seat nearest the door.

A minute later Mr. Hermon himself entered, and the boys greeted him with a sudden and vigorous clapping of hands. He checked his queer, plunging gait at the sound, and regarded the young people before him with a benevolent smile. Evidently he was not displeased, though he lifted his hand to check the demonstration in another moment. "Boys," he said, "I believe you're glad to be back in this room. Bless you all! I'm glad to see you here; but greet me after this with good lessons, and I shall appreciate the attention more than any other you can show me."

He dropped into his chair, whipped out his class-book, and called the roll with the air of one who wishes to clear at once all obstructions in the way of business. One of the first names read was that of Dick Julian, and Sue noted that the boy who responded with a careless "Here," was the youth who had acted as her special providence the day before. The name, Susan Orcutt, which came last, somehow fell upon her ear with a stranger sound than any of the others, and she wondered, as she answered, whether it really were that old acquaintance



of hers who was sitting there, Cicero in hand, or some other girl to whom she was quite a stranger.

The odd, unnatural feeling passed, however, in a few minutes. There was no recitation that morning, but Mr. Hermon occupied the time with talk of the great Roman whose works they were to study, sketching his life and character in vivid outline, and giving, in swift, glowing word pictures, glimpses of the time in which he lived. He dwelt with some detail on the oration for the poet Archias, which, as he said, would form "the delightful, the inexpressibly delightful, introduction to the term's work;" then, with that brusqueness of tone which Sue remembered from the day before, assigned the first thirty-five lines (or the Exordium, as he called it) for the initial lesson, and dismissed the class.

Every one rose but Sue. She sat for a moment as if petrified. Thirty-five lines! And with all the struggle of the day before she had mastered only ten! She glanced at her classmates to see how they bore the appalling statement, but apparently she herself was the only one disturbed.

"It must be mere play for every one of them but me," thought the dismayed girl, and the question



occurred to her at that moment whether Dick Julian had really been an angel in disguise the day before, or had merely acted as an assistant to her own evil genius in luring her on to destruction.

The rest of the exercises at the Academy that morning had slight interest for her. She joined the chemistry class and took notes of the introductory lecture. She sat with the students in English literature, and tried to prepare the topics for the next day's lesson, but through it all her thoughts wandered persistently to those thirty-five lines, and when at last she was free to give herself up to them in her own room, she lost herself in speedy oblivion of everything else. She even resented it a little when Bertha suggested that the table which she was monopolizing with her books must be set for dinner, and asked rather peevishly why they couldn't take something in their hands if they "must eat all the time."

Bertha made no response at the moment, but perhaps the question rankled a little, for later in the evening she remarked somewhat pensively that if things were to go on like this she didn't see how Sue ever expected to get any time for housework. (She had generously refrained from making the



observation until after she had herself washed and put away the dishes.)

Sue started, and for a moment looked really conscience stricken. "Oh Bertha," she said remorsefully, "I didn't mean to let you do all the work alone to-night! Why didn't you tell me to come and help? I forgot the dishes. I declare I forgot that there *were* such things as dishes, or in fact that there was anything in the world but this Latin lesson. But I'm getting hold of it, Bertha," she went on, her eyes kindling. "It isn't near as hard for me as 'twas yesterday, and I do believe that after a few days I can get my lesson in a reasonable amount of time. *Then* you won't find me shirking my part. I honestly didn't mean to to-night."

"Oh, I know it, I know it," said Bertha patiently. She felt rather penitent now for having said a word, and she added, after a minute, "By the way, Sue, I've been thinking that perhaps I'd better get the meals for two weeks instead of one; that would give you a chance to get a good start, and besides it would be only fair. Father'll be coming up by that time with a fresh supply from home, and you could begin as I did, with a full pantry instead of an empty one."



She was quite unconscious of the exquisite color she had given to her own generosity by attempting to make it seem a simple act of justice, but it was by no means lost upon Sue.

"Oh Bertha," she cried, pushing her books into a reckless heap before her, and springing up to throw her arms around her sister's neck, "the poet Archias is lovely, but there's nothing in this world to match with *you*! It's just like you to suggest such a thing, but you shan't do it. It would be an outrage, and nothing short of it, for me to let you carry the heavy end of the work so long."

Perhaps the little quarrel, hot with sisterly affection, which followed, was really a help to Sue in learning her lesson. For a quarter of an hour she forgot Cicero altogether, and when she returned to her task it was with fresh, exhilarated feeling. One hour more of concentrated effort, and the lines were hers. She read them to Bertha in the glow of her delight, rendering them in the best English at her command, and even then could not refrain from reading them to herself, over and over again, turning word and phrase with the willing pains of a true lover of language, in her longing to make the translation as worthy as possible of the great



original. It was far enough from perfect at last, she knew that, but she knew too that she had done her best. For a little while she stood before the window looking out into the still, soft moonlight, then she stole blissfully away to bed.



## CHAPTER VII.

### A TRIUMPH WHICH TURNS INTO SUDDEN DEFEAT.

THERE was no timidity in Sue's step when she entered the Cicero class the next morning. Mr. Hermon was not there, but the boys were most of them in their places, and it appeared to her that their faces were hardly as cheerful as on the previous morning. Indeed, an air of anxiety seemed to pervade the room.

"Have you got it, Julian?" demanded several voices in concert, as the boy with whom she already felt half acquainted, swung carelessly into the room.

"Got it?" he repeated in a grumbling tone. "Well, I should rather say I haven't. It is the toughest passage I ever struck, and an outrageously long lesson, into the bargain. I worked a solid hour on it last night, and couldn't make head or tail of it. But, hang it," he added, "it's too much to expect of us to have the lesson the first day."



“That’s so,” assented a half-a-dozen others, and one of them added that, in view of this very obvious fact, Mr. Hermon would probably let them “off easy,” and read it himself.

The expectation did not strike Sue as altogether reasonable, and Mr. Hermon’s manner, when he entered the room a moment later, hardly seemed to encourage it. He was slightly behind time, and had in his manner more than usual of that crusty impatience which he so often exhibited. It melted, however, when the roll was called, and the classic volume fairly open before him.

“Well, scholars,” he said, rubbing his great hands together, and regarding the class with a comprehensive smile, “I hope you’re all in love with Cicero this morning!”

The expression of the class was not altogether responsive. “Sarcastic, isn’t he?” whispered a boy back of Sue.

Mr. Hermon did not hear it. “It is a noble passage which we have this morning,” he continued, “an elegant introduction to the most elegant plea he ever made before the Roman bar.”

He paused, and some one murmured interrogatively, “A little hard, though, isn’t it?”



"Hard?" repeated Mr. Hermon, regarding the questioner with a look of mild surprise. "I don't recall that fact in connection with it. I well remember that when I myself first read it I was so charmed with the thought and style, that I found it impossible to lay down the oration until I had read it to the end."

An irrepressible groan ran round the class. The boy back of Sue muttered something about "rubbing it in." Then he ventured aloud, "But you must remember, Mr. Hermon, that you were a genius. You'd scarcely expect anything of that sort from *us*."

Mr. Hermon frowned. "Genius, sir!" he repeated. "How many times must I remind you that the chief part of genius is nothing more nor less than the capacity for downright, hard work? Well," he added, his voice softening a little, "perhaps I did have an unusual facility in the study of language, at least an unusual fondness for it. But let us see what we can do with this opening passage. Cady, you may render the first ten lines."

A tall boy in front of him half rose at the summons, then settled back into his seat again.



"The fact is, Mr. Hermon," he said in an embarrassed tone, "those first lines gave me considerable trouble. I can't say I really got hold of them."

"A bad beginning, Cady, a bad beginning," said Mr. Hermon, with a shake of the head. "And let me tell you right here, that if there's any truth in the old saying which I sometimes hear among you, that 'a bad beginning makes a good ending,' I have never been able to discover it, sir. Colby, we will give *you* a chance at those lines."

The boy who sat next evidently did not covet the opportunity. "I'm in the same boat with Cady, sir," he mumbled apologetically.

"Boat!" repeated the principal, with a frown of displeasure. "There is no 'boat' in this room. Don't make the confession of your ignorance the worse by couching it in the language of slang. Next!"

The next boy rose to his feet, and heedless of the admonition which the irate principal had just given, said desperately that he wasn't sure he could do it, but he'd "make a stagger at it." The "stagger" was, however, so obviously a stumble that he was remanded to his seat by a sharp rap



of the teacher's pencil before he had proceeded far.

"Next!" ejaculated Mr. Hermon, whose impatience was evidently reaching a dangerous point, and "next!" he reiterated still more sharply when a dogged shaking of the head was the only response. The exasperated principal now rose to his feet. Jupiter Olympus in the act of hurling a thunder-bolt could scarcely have looked more terrible. "Is there any one in this class," he demanded, "who can read those lines, and read them correctly?"

If he had not added the last clause, and with such a fierceness of emphasis, probably several would have made the attempt, but anything short of positive knowledge would have been presumption now. There was dead silence for a moment, and Sue Orcutt suddenly discovered that hers was the only hand lifted in the class.

"Miss Orcutt," said the principal almost sternly, "you may read."

She rose to her feet. She felt that she was making her debut as a member of the Cicero class at an awful moment, and her voice shook as she began the reading. But it steadied itself as she



went on. There was no possibility of forgetting a word in the lines which had cost her so much study, and she rendered the passage without hesitation, smoothly and correctly.

“Admirable!” exclaimed the principal, and he added, bending upon her a look of peculiar surprise and pleasure, “You may go on.”

Nothing could have pleased Sue more than that permission. She resumed the reading with a thrill of delight in her voice, and, in the same clear, unhesitating manner as before, read the following lines. Once she paused, and sent a questioning glance toward Mr. Hermon, but apparently he had no wish that she should stop, and without pausing a second time, she read to the end of the lesson.

When she sat down a murmur of applause ran round the class. Its teacher had been transformed from Jupiter the thunderer to Jupiter the radiant and benignant father. “Miss Orcutt,” he said, bending towards her, “I thank you. You have given us a most excellent, a most charming translation. And let me say, young gentlemen,” he added, turning to the masculine portion of the class, “that she has saved your division this morning from complete disgrace.”



Poor, happy Sue! There was one half-hour of utter, unspeakable bliss, and then came a sudden and cruel transition. Perhaps her felicitous translation had made Mr. Hermon more impatient of mistakes than usual, and, in spite of the help which her classmates might be supposed to have received from her reading, there was a surprising amount of crudity in the efforts that followed. Suddenly he clapped the covers of his book together and declared that he would waste no more time.

"The fact is," he exclaimed, "there is only one member of the class who has prepared this lesson. Perhaps," he continued with cold emphasis, "perhaps you expected some indulgence on the ground that it is the first, but let me tell you, young gentlemen, that, in my opinion, that fact only makes your failing the more inexcusable."

He eyed the delinquents for a moment, with his forehead bent, and his eyes looking scorn from under his shaggy brows, then, pointing suddenly at the first boy in the row before him, he exclaimed, "Morgan, how much time did you put on this lesson?"

Sue started. She would not like to be called upon to answer that question; but surely, in view of the good recitation she had made, it would be,



in her case, omitted. She listened calmly enough while it was put to her classmates, one after another, in quick succession. Most of them confessed to having spent but less than an hour. A few only thought they had spent a little more.

"It is just as I expected," said Mr. Hermon. "There can be only one explanation for such a lesson as this." He paused for an instant, then turning suddenly to Sue, said with an accent of inexpressible sweetness, "Miss Orcutt, will you have the goodness to tell us how much time *you* spent on this lesson?"

A wave of crimson swept over Sue's face and neck. To answer that question truthfully, to reveal that she had spent not so much hours as days in desperate struggle with those lines, would surely be to reveal her own lack of preparation for the study, to confess, before the whole class, what she had concealed when she gained admission to their number. A look of alarm, even of guilt, leaped into her wide, gray eyes, and her hands clasped themselves tightly together as if in an involuntary appeal for mercy.

The silence which had preceded her offer to read the first lines was nothing to that which fell upon the



class now. There was a sudden exchange of knowing glances, a sudden lifting of eyebrows, and one boy shaped his lips into the inaudible word "*Pony*." But Sue saw nothing of this. She saw only Mr. Hermon's face, and noted, in a half-dazed way, the rapid change in its expression. Surprise, disappointment, grief, and then a stern displeasure replaced the smile of a moment before.

"I will excuse you from answering that question," he said slowly; then, turning to the other members of the class, said, with an inexpressible dejection of manner, "You will take the same lesson to-morrow, with ten additional lines," and dismissed them with a wave of his hand.

Sue rose with the rest. Her face was pale now, and her lips quivered. She did not guess the construction which the class had put upon her silence. It did not once occur to her that Mr. Hermon himself believed her guilty of a deceit from which every instinct of her nature would have recoiled in disgust and horror. She fancied, poor child, from the twinge in her own conscience, that he had guessed the little deception of which she had been tacitly guilty in that first interview, and was angry with her for gaining admission to the class under false pretences.



She lingered a moment as she passed his desk, and if he had given her a single glance she would have confessed everything then and there; but he did not give her a single glance, and she hurried on, heartsick and miserable.

In the chemistry class Bertha noticed how unhappy she looked, and wondered whether it were possible that, in spite of all her study, she had failed in reciting that dreadful lesson. She whispered the question as the class broke up, but a desperate "Don't ask me," was Sue's only response. It was not till they were in their room at noon that she heard the story. Then Sue gave it in full, and even in the depths of this after bitterness could not repress the note of triumph in her voice, as she told how she alone of all the class had read these difficult lines, and Mr. Hermon himself had pronounced the rendering fine.

"And then he went and asked that horrid question," she ended, with the tears rushing hotly into her eyes, "and how could I tell him?"

"You couldn't, of course," said Bertha, in her perfectly matter-of-fact way. "I don't believe you could have reckoned all the time you spent on that lesson if you had tried. Why didn't you say you



didn't know; that you didn't take any account of time, but just kept on studying till you had learned it?"

"Oh, why didn't I?" groaned Sue. "Bertha, you're a great deal cleverer than I am." And then she added, a doubt of the sufficiency even of this excellent answer crossing her mind, as a merciful relief to her own sense of stupidity. "But I don't believe even that would have saved me. He'd have known something was wrong or I should have been able to make some sort of estimate. Oh, it was like murder, it was sure to come out."

She groaned again as the remembrance of that awful moment swept over her, then went on piteously, "But you can't think what a look he gave me. He saw everything in a flash, and set me down for a hypocrite and a fraud. Oh, I know he did! I could feel his eyes boring right into me, and the way he said, 'I will excuse you from answering that question,' was something fearful."

"Well, I think it was a perfect shame for him to treat you like that if he *had* found out," said Bertha hotly. "Of course it would have been better if you had told him the exact truth at the start, and I said so all the time, but you had



shown that you *could* read Cicero even without the usual preparation, and I don't see what there was for him to be so mad about."

Sue had not alluded to her own frantic blushing, and she had quite omitted to describe the look of guilt and alarm which she had sent towards Mr. Hermon. Possibly even Bertha would have guessed, had she seen it, that he labored under some strange misapprehension.

"Well, I wouldn't think any more about it," she said, after a moment consumed in silent indignation over the injustice her sister had suffered. "You made a perfectly splendid record on this first lesson, and I'm just as proud of you as I can be."

We are bidden in the great Book to "let brotherly love continue," but, ah, what a world this would be could *sisterly* love but begin and hold full sway in the hearts of its people! Sue dried her eyes and held up her head again. She even ate heartily of the luncheon Bertha set out, and to which she had added, as a special consolation to her sister, a dish of their mother's best preserve.

The lesson for another day was prepared with the same scrupulous care as before, and when Sue



entered the class the next morning, it was with a fluttering hope that Mr. Hermon might have forgotten his displeasure. She had strong doubt of it, however, when the lesson was over. He had not called upon her for any part in the recitation, and the short, peremptory speaking of her name in roll-call was the only sign he had given that he knew of her presence.

It was terribly depressing, but again Bertha came to her rescue. For her part, she could see plenty of reason why her sister should not be called upon to recite when she had read the entire lesson the day before. That would have been to slight some of the idlers who certainly needed to be held rigorously to their work.

This sounded plausible, but the weight did not lift from Sue's heart. She said nothing, however. She set herself bravely to the work she had to do, and fortunately there was enough of it to leave her little time for morbid musing. She was not, however, proof against the bitterness of soul which took possession of her with another recitation. If there had been any hope for her before in Bertha's solution of Mr. Hermon's action, it would have vanished now and completely.



The lines for the day had been rendered indifferently by the class. One passage in particular had been bungled by successive readers. "Is there any one who can read it better?" the teacher had asked, and with a sudden throbbing of hope Sue had timidly lifted her hand. Surely Mr. Hermon saw it, for his eyes swept the class with the glance of an eagle, but he passed it by and read the lines himself.

It was more than the proud, high-spirited girl could bear. Her hand dropped helplessly at her side, and for a moment her eyes swam with tears. Then she lifted her book, and dashed away the big, salt drops behind its friendly covers.

Talking things over at the room that night, Bertha expressed a very decided opinion. "If I were you, Sue," she said, "I'd go straight to Mr. Hermon and have an understanding. If he doesn't want you in the class, he ought to say so. For my part I should a thousand times rather *not* be in it, than to stay and be treated like that."

Sue was silent for a moment, then she shook her head, and her lips straightened themselves to a line which Bertha knew of old. "If Mr. Hermon wants to send me out of the class," she said, "he



has plenty of chance. I'm not going to deliberately ask him to do it. It's bad enough to sit there like a graven image day after day, but I suppose I can learn my lessons and get the benefit of his instruction, for all that. Oh Bertha, he's a perfectly wonderful teacher! I never imagined till I was in his class that anybody *could* know as much as he does."

In its way her decision was undoubtedly a victory, but it carried with it no sense of gladness. She remembered just then, with a melancholy smile, her mother's saying that she'd know the difference easily enough between Merton Academy and Heaven.



## CHAPTER VIII.

SUE MAKES A VISIT TO THE LIBRARY AND OVER-  
HEARS A BIT OF RATHER INTERESTING CONVERSA-  
TION.

IF all the weeks of a term at school were as long as the first, what an extraordinary space of time young people would have for the improvement of their minds! It seemed to the Orcutt girls, when that first Saturday came, that they had been away from home at least a month already. They were not sorry for the day's release from school duties. Indeed, the time was needed for bringing up the arrears of domestic work and setting their household affairs in order, and, as their mother had wisely pointed out, Saturday was just the time to do it.

With the present division of labor, the washing fell to Sue, and promptly after breakfast she betook herself to the laundry, which Mrs. Porter kindly placed at their disposal, and installed her-



self as mistress of the tub. She did not dislike the position. Washing was a kind of work which one could do, and at the same time build an air-castle or weave a rhyme, and there had been hours in Sue's life when she could have said, with Miss Alcott's blythe heroine:

“Queen of the tub, I merrily sing,  
While the white foam dashes high,  
And cheerily wash, and rinse, and wring,  
And fasten the clothes to dry.”

But not this morning. There had been a weight at her heart ever since that wretched moment in the Cicero class three days ago, and if her work could only have absorbed her thought more completely, she would have been heartily glad.

Meanwhile, in the regions above, Bertha with a lighter heart was accomplishing her part of the day's business. The three round loaves of “salt-rising bread” (for which she had set the sponge betimes that morning) rose to a glorious height; the “feather-cake,” which she had selected as her initial effort because the receipt only called for “one egg and a piece of butter the size of a walnut,” justified its name by its exquisite lightness, and her “crisp, crumbling crullers” would have been worthy



of a place on the table of Frau Van Tassel herself. Everything moved as if by magic under the hand of the energetic young housewife.

By two o'clock that afternoon the work which had been planned for the day was finished. The washing swung in the sunshine, the rooms were swept and garnished, the pantry was spick and span, and the kitchen stove shone with a fine, new polish.

"If mother could only look in on us now!" said Bertha wistfully, and for a moment both the girls were silent, thinking with what a satisfaction it would crown their labors if her glance of approval could only rest on them all.

Perhaps it was the touch of homesickness which came with the thought that she was far away, which made Sue exclaim suddenly, "Bertha, what do you say to spending the rest of the afternoon at the library? I believe 'twould do us more good than anything else in the world. For my part, I've been pining to get back there ever since last Monday."

Bertha's eyes widened with a doubtful expression. She was fond of books, but it had never been the custom of the Orcutt family to sit down to read when there was any work that could be done. That



recreation had been always reserved for evenings, and for Sundays.

“It *would* be nice to go,” she said hesitatingly, “but I don’t quite know as we ought.” Her eyes wandered to the window, and she added more briskly, “Judging from the way those clothes flap, I should think they were almost dry, and maybe we could get them ironed before supper. If we only could, I should feel as if we’d finished up this week’s work in splendid shape.”

The look which she bestowed upon her sister with the last words was persuasive, but Sue was seized with a sudden spirit of revolt.

“Oh Bertha,” she groaned, “how can you mention it? I always did think enough was as good as a feast, especially when it came to the supply of housework. I declare, I won’t iron a piece this afternoon! You may do your things if you want to, but you mustn’t touch a single dud of mine. I’ll iron them before breakfast some day next week — or wear them rough dry,” she threw in recklessly. “There’s an aching void in me that nothing but that library can fill, and there’ll be no answering for the consequences if I don’t get there.”

It certainly would have been a waste of energy



to have resisted the longing she felt just then for a book. The pity of it was that she really felt a little guilty as she hurried off. "I don't mean to stay very long," she called back to Bertha when she was half-way down the stairs. "At any rate, I'll be home before dark."

"You'd better not make any rash promises," said Bertha. She knew too well what the consequences were likely to be if her sister once settled herself with an engrossing book; but she added no further admonition.

A few minutes later she herself was in the drying-yard investigating the state of the clothes, and before supper more than half of the week's ironing was done. She would gladly have done it all, but a truer generosity made her leave untouched the pieces that belonged personally to Sue, for she would not force upon her sister the feeling that she had taken her recreation at the expense of another.

"Perhaps some people do have to break away from work now and then," she said to herself musingly, and then she added with a more positive conviction, "Anyway, with that feeling upon her, she wouldn't have amounted to anything here."



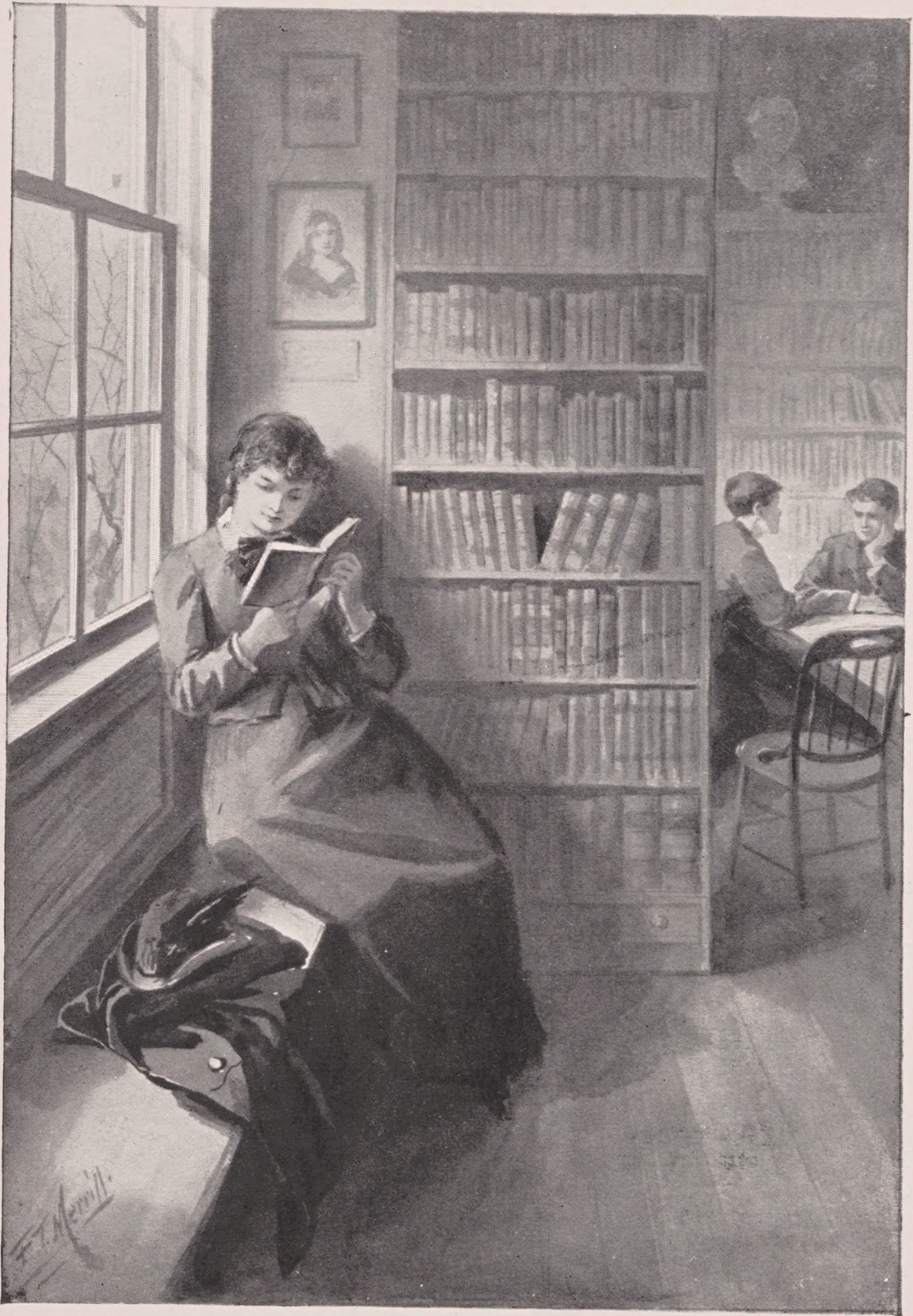
Meanwhile in the library Sue had found her Elysium. For a while she had wandered about the room, filled with the mere delight of looking at those rows upon rows of books; then she had strayed to the poets' corner, and established herself in the deep window seat with the *Lady of the Lake*.

It was a pleasant corner; a long projecting case of books cut it off from the main apartment, and made its seclusion more complete than that of any other part of the room. This, in itself, was an attractive feature to Sue. Then, too, the volumes of poetry had for her a peculiar fascination, and the final charm was given to the spot by a picture which hung full in the light of the warm south window. There were a number of pictures, mostly engravings, scattered about the room, some of which were familiar from the frontispieces in the few classic volumes at home, but the face which looked down from the poets' corner was that of a stranger. It was a young face, so young indeed as to seem almost that of a child, yet so beautiful in its sweet seriousness, so touched with the impress of a high personality, that for a while it held Sue's eyes and heart completely.









"THE WIZARD OF THE NORTH HAD HER COMPLETELY IN HIS POWER."



“He must have been one of the poets,” she said to herself, and it seemed to her that if she could only find the words he had written they would prove to be a message straight to herself. In the absence of any clue, however, she presently consoled herself with the *Lady of the Lake*, and for the next few hours the “Wizard of the North” had her as completely in his power as if he had really touched her with an enchanted wand.

She was a rapid reader. Her eyes seemed fairly to devour a page as they flew over it, and the volume was finished when at length she laid it down. The last canto she had read (though she did not know it) with her face almost touching the page, and she was startled now to see how dark the room had grown. The names of the books around her had almost faded from their covers, and the beautiful young face had grown indistinct in the twilight.

Evidently it was time to go home, but the spell of the enchanter was not quite broken, and for a little longer she sat in her place, dreaming of the fair Ellen, and the bold Rhoderick Dhu, the latter of whom, like all spirited young people, she much preferred to the accepted lover.



Suddenly she was roused by the sound of voices quite near her. Whether or not she had been the only occupant of the library for the last three hours, she did not know. All the students at the Academy might have filed in and out without her hearing them while she was occupied with that entrancing volume, and in her retired position they might easily enough have failed to see her. It was plain, however, that at this moment there were two persons in the room beside herself, and the voice of one of them had a familiar accent.

"I say, old fellow," — the words struck suddenly into her musing, — "have you got out the Cicero for Monday? If you haven't, suppose we put our heads together this evening and see what we can do. It's an awfully hard lesson, and prodigiously long into the bargain."

"Of course it is," growled the other; "that's the way it goes with Mr. Hermon. He's just as likely to give us fifty lines in the toughest place as the easiest. I suppose it's because everything came so confoundedly easy to him, that he doesn't know the difference between what's hard and what isn't. But I tell you he's got a deal to answer for in the temptation he puts on poor wretches like us."



“So he has,” said the first speaker, and Sue identified the voice now as belonging to Dick Julian. “For my part, I think he’s altogether too hard on that Miss Orcutt. I feel downright sorry for her. The way she looked yesterday when he wouldn’t let her read, would have moved the heart of a hitching-post. I’ll wager she’s studying like a Trojan now, and he might let bygones be bygones. Hang it all, I think there *are* times when a body has a perfect right to use a pony!”

Strange as it may seem, Sue Orcutt heard that last word without the slightest idea of its peculiar meaning. What meaning indeed should it have to a simple little girl who had lived all her life in the country, and had studied nowhere save in a district school? The remark did, to be sure, strike her as somewhat irrelevant, but for that matter she scarcely gave it a thought. What really interested her was the sympathy expressed in her own hard fortune, and she felt grateful to Dick Julian for his outspoken opinion that Mr. Hermon might let bygones be bygones. If he only would! She felt uncomfortable and annoyed at her own position as a listener, but the embarrassment of going forward now kept her in her place a moment longer.



"It wouldn't do for Mr. Hermon to hear you say that," said the other lightly, "and anyway, it's no use trying to get round him. He always finds it out if you cheat the least bit in the world, and there's no mercy to be had from him after that. You might as well commit the seven deadly sins and be done with it. Come," he added; "it's time to be going. I'll be up at your room this evening."

There was a pushing of chairs, and a moment later Sue heard the door slam behind her departing classmates.

It was easy enough to leave the Lady of the Lake now. The spell had been completely broken, and the girl felt herself once more in the world of her own griefs and troubles.

She put the volume back on the shelf and turned away from the poets' corner. Bertha was probably wishing at this moment that she would come. She remembered her promise to her sister, with a twinge of conscience, and hastily left the room. But as she hurried through the darkening streets her thoughts brooded bitterly on this one thing, that Mr. Hermon kept a merciless resentment for the pupil who had once deceived him the least bit in the world.



## CHAPTER IX.

THE LITTLE DRESSMAKER COMES TO SUE'S RESCUE.

SUPPER was on the table when Sue reached the rooms, and Bertha, seated by the evening lamp, was busily engaged in darning stockings.

"Did you have a good time reading?" she asked cheerfully, as her sister entered.

"Oh, beautiful," responded Sue, but for once she seemed little inclined to talk about the book she had been reading. As for that scrap of conversation which she had overheard, she had half made up her mind to say nothing about it. There was no use in troubling Bertha any more.

No doubt her sister could have drawn her out if she had tried, but she was in a hurry to despatch the evening meal, and besides, she had something of her own to report. She had received a call from a girl whose acquaintance she had made during the week in the algebra class, and who had furnished various items of interest concerning the



Academy. Among others, she had mentioned a Saturday night meeting, of a semi-religious character, which Mr. Hermon was in the habit of holding in his own recitation room for those who chose to come. His talks, she declared, were something wonderful, and she had promised to stop on her way that evening for Sue and Bertha.

Sue winced. She had no desire to put herself unnecessarily into the presence of the man whose displeasure she felt so keenly, and she said at once that she could not go, that she must spend the evening in study. To which, however, she added, that she hoped her staying would make no difference with Bertha. Bertha did not let it. She had given her word to her new friend, and a half-hour later, when the latter appeared, she joined her in the walk to the Academy, leaving her sister to her own company and that of her books.

For a while the books lay unopened on the table. Sue had meant to spend the evening in study. Half of her Cicero was yet to translate, but somehow, for the first time, the girl almost felt as if she did not care to translate it. After all, did the privilege of sitting in Mr. Hermon's class-room, and hearing the words of wisdom which fell from



his lips, compensate her for feeling herself a sort of Pariah, cut off relentlessly from his good opinion? In her thought she accused him of being hard-hearted and cruel, and she wondered, with a bitter sort of smile, what kind of a talk he would make in that meeting of his, if asked to expound the text, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

She was not much given to crying, but she felt so utterly wretched, as she sat there alone, that the tears came, and she did not try to check them. She had given herself up so wholly to melancholy that she did not hear a patter of steps on the stairs, and a brisk tap at the door had been followed by a cheery "May I come in?" before she realized that a caller had come to invade her quiet.

She knew in an instant that it must be the little dressmaker, who, during the week, had been working out of town. Saturday night had brought her home, and doubtless she had thought it a friendly thing to look in on the new roomers. Sue wished with all her heart that she had postponed the neighborly errand. Miss Graham was the last person by whom she wished to be found in her



present state, but apparently there was no help for it.

She dashed away the tears with one hand, and with the other put out the light of the student lamp. Then, as briskly as possible, she called, "Yes, come," but she knew that her voice sounded watery in spite of herself, and the lamp, whose flame had been unceremoniously quenched by flapping a paper at the top of the chimney, revenged itself by sending up a sullen cloud of smoke as the door opened.

"Ah," exclaimed the little dressmaker, whose quick eyes noted everything in a flash, "I see you remember my fondness for sitting in the dark. How nice of you!"

She accepted the chair Sue offered her, and established herself before the fire in the easy manner of the week before. It was evident that she at least was in her former good spirits, and if she perceived the villanous odor of the lamp, for which Sue was apologizing profusely, it did not appear to annoy her.

"My dear," she declared gayly, "you should have your olfactories in better training. What's the use of being all taken up with a whiff of kerosene, when



there are plenty of agreeable odors to be had for the sniffing?"

She elevated her small nose as she spoke, and added reflectively, "'Fe, fi, fo, fum, I smell' — baked beans! Upon my word I do! There's a pot of them in the oven this minute, getting ready for your breakfast to-morrow morning, and if there are not a lot of good things, fresh baked, in the pantry, I'm mightily mistaken, that's all."

Sue smiled in spite of herself. The little dress-maker's gayety was infectious. "You're a pretty good guesser," she said. "At least you know what folks are likely to have for breakfast Sunday morning. For that matter, though, possibly you do get the odor of the beans, for I had the oven door open just now. But as for the things in the pantry, you can't smell those unless your smelling faculty is entirely different from Sam Weller's 'wision.'"

Miss Graham laughed, and admitted that circumstances altered cases. There were times when her faculties were keener than at others. Then she fell to guessing what the good things were which were to be found in the larder of the young house-keepers, and Sue was presently recounting with much animation her sister's culinary exploits, to



which her caller listened with approving nods, and the gratifying assurance that she was not in the least surprised.

"Next week I shall be the cook myself," added Sue, whose accent had really grown quite cheerful. "I don't intend to let Bertha carry off all the honors, though she was heartless enough to propose to keep the post a week longer. Between you and me, Miss Graham, I have a suspicion that she doesn't count much on my abilities along that line, but I'll show her a thing or two, see if I don't."

"Of course you will," said the little dressmaker, "and I shall want a full account of your triumphs. I only hope you won't live too high, you girls, in your zeal at housekeeping. 'Plain living and high thinking' is the rule for ambitious young people. But how have you been getting on at school? Tell me about that."

For a moment Sue did not speak, and when she did, the little dressmaker noted that the cheerful accent had quite gone from her voice.

"Oh, we're getting used to things," she said with an obvious constraint, "but we've had to study pretty hard this first week, — 'specially me."

"Why, I had an idea that you learned the easier



of the two," said the little dressmaker; "I supposed you took to books like a duck to water."

This was rather gratifying, and Sue could not help explaining herself a little. "I do learn easily as a general thing," she said, "but the Latin has been giving me some trouble. You see I haven't had as much preparation for Cicero as the rest of the class, and it comes pretty hard at first."

She made this gentle statement quite as if it were a fact of no account; then the full meaning of it, and the memory of all she had suffered in consequence, rushed over her, and she caught her breath with something that sounded like an incipient sob.

Miss Graham was puzzled. She had wholly mistaken this girl if there was in her make-up any shrinking from hard work. Something had evidently gone wrong.

"Well, you mustn't feel discouraged," she said cheerily. "Perhaps Mr. Hermon doesn't take your disadvantages fully into account, and expects too much of you at first. But it won't take him long to do you full justice. There's no one in the world who respects downright hard work more than he does, and he's tenderness itself over the mis-



takes of a scholar who has really tried her best."

She had, without knowing it, driven an arrow into the very heart of Sue's grief, and it was more than the girl could bear.

"You don't know anything about him if you think *that!*" she exclaimed fiercely. "He's the hardest hearted man I ever saw. He doesn't care a bit how hard you've worked. He doesn't care if you've learned your lesson perfectly. It all goes for nothing if—if—" she paused a moment, then went on incoherently—"if you've kept anything back beforehand. I did keep something back, but it was only because I wanted a chance to work the harder, and now he treats me with perfect contempt. He acts as if I wasn't fit even to be counted one of his scholars."

Her voice broke with a sob of the most unmistakable sort now, and the tears she had driven back at the little dressmaker's coming rushed out in a perfect flood.

Miss Graham was bewildered. She had cheered more than one disconsolate maiden in that room, and had rather prided herself on her skill in doing it, but the attack from which Sue was suffering



appeared to her to be of a wholly new and unprecedented sort. "Why, I don't understand," she gasped. "It's the strangest thing I ever heard of. Tell me about it. Tell me everything."

Sue gulped down her sobs with a desperate effort. Yes, she would tell everything; she was hungry for sympathy, and fierce in her longing to shatter the ideal which this mistaken admirer of Mr. Hermon had set up. It was a long story, but she gave it from beginning to end without stopping. She told of that first interview, when the question of her studies was at issue, and of the turn of fortune by which she had evaded answering his question as to her preparation for Cicero; of the hours she had spent in mastering that first lesson, and how she had read it on the following day,—she alone of all the class,—and Mr. Hermon had praised and thanked her. Then, in a voice thick with tears, she gave the climax of the story, how Mr. Hermon had asked that cruel question, and guessed her secret in the silence which she had been fairly unable to break.

It was at this point that the little dressmaker, who had listened with a breathless interest, interrupted for the first time. A smile was quivering



at the corners of her mouth, though her eyes were unmistakably moist. "Oh, you poor, dear child!" she cried. "I suppose you blushed to the roots of your hair and looked as if you were scared half out of your senses."

"I don't know how I looked, I'm sure," groaned Sue; "but I know I felt hot all over, and I almost wished the floor would open and swallow me up."

"Of course, of course!" cried the little dress-maker in a tone of positive delight. "Oh, you poor, stupid little thing! Don't you see what he thought? Don't you see the only thing he *could* have thought?"

Sue did not speak for a moment. Miss Graham's tone struck her as singularly unsuited to the occasion.

"Oh," exclaimed the latter, letting go of the girl's hand, which she had seized in her excitement, and clasping both her own above her head, "to think that a girl who could learn that lesson should be so utterly daft over a simple thing like this! It wasn't that he thought you had spent *so much time* in learning it, you demented little goose, but that you hadn't spent *any*. Don't you see?"

Sue stared at Miss Graham like a person dazed.



A new idea, but one of such an overwhelming sort that it simply took her breath away, had suddenly dawned upon her.

“Why, it’s just as plain as the nose on your face—in fact, a great deal plainer than it is in this light—that he thought you were cheating about the lesson, and had been using a pony.”

Sue found her voice now. She remembered suddenly that she had heard that word before. “Miss Graham,” she exclaimed, “what is a ‘pony’?”

“A pony?” repeated the woman of the world, “why, it’s a ready-made translation, a thing you mount and ride on over hard places, instead of stumping along as you ought to, on your own two feet.”

The tragedy had begun to assume the complexion of a farce, and there was a sound in the little dressmaker’s voice at that moment suspiciously like a laugh. But there was no laughing for Sue. She sprang to her feet with a look which made her companion instantly sober.

“What are you going to do?” she asked, as the girl darted past her towards the door.

“Do?” repeated Sue; “I’m going straight to Mr. Hermon. If he thinks I did a thing like *that*!



If he thinks I'm such a cheating hypocrite — such a —” There were simply no words to express her feelings, and she whirled herself into her cloak and hat in an unspeakable silence.

Miss Graham was scarcely prepared for the effect which had been produced by her solution of the mystery, and yet she hardly wondered at the intensity of the girl's feeling.

“Well, he certainly ought to know how it is,” she said decidedly. “It would make all the difference in the world with his point of view. But is it best to tell him while you're so excited? Wouldn't it be better to wait till Monday, and see him after class?”

“Wait?” cried Sue, with a look which would have been severe if she had been ordering Satan to get behind her; “I won't wait an instant longer than it takes me to get to the Academy. He's there now, and I must see him to-night. I shall go crazy if I don't get this thing off my mind.”

Miss Graham began to think there really was some danger. “But you mustn't go alone,” she said, rising. “Let me go with you.”

Sue waved her hand impatiently. She could



not wait even long enough for the nimble little dressmaker to put on her wraps. "It's just about time for the meeting to be out, and I shall meet Bertha," she said. Then, without another word, she dashed out of the room and down the stairs.

K



## CHAPTER X.

### SUE HAS AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. THEOPHILUS HERMON.

IT was a sharp, winter evening, and the tingle in the air mingled with the tingle in Sue's veins as she hurried towards the Academy. It would not do to actually run through the streets of Merton, but the rate at which she sped along made more than one sober-minded person turn and look wonderingly after her. She was not calm enough to try to arrange what she should say to Mr. Hermon. Perhaps (the doubt crossed her mind more than once) he was not really under the illusion which Miss Graham had supposed, but the very possibility set every nerve quivering with shame. She would tell him the truth now, the whole truth. It was the only possible relief.

The meeting had evidently not been a long one, and as she drew near the Academy she met groups of students on their way home. Bertha did not



seem to be among them. Probably she had taken a different way from the usual one with her new friend. After all, it did not matter, Sue said to herself; she could do her errand alone.

The lights were still burning in the room where the meeting had been held, and through the windows she caught a glimpse of Mr. Hermon himself in the act of putting on his coat. A minute more and she would have been too late. Her heart began to beat furiously, and she scarcely breathed as she flew down the path and up the Academy steps. In the hall she met Mr. Hermon. He was passing out with his head bent, apparently in a deeper abstraction than usual. He would have passed without seeing her if she had not stopped him.

“Oh, Mr. Hermon,” she said, with her voice in a flutter, “may I see you just a minute? I want to tell you something — something important.”

Mr. Hermon pulled himself out of his abstraction and looked at her for a moment with a wondering expression. Perhaps he did not remember the eager young face. He seemed somehow a little puzzled, but he said, “Oh yes,” in a rather indifferent tone, and turned back into the room. He did not ask



her to sit down, but stood facing her, with his elbow on his desk, in an attitude of listening. If he had shown more interest, if he had even seemed to know her, it would have been easier for Sue, but she was resolved to make no pause.

“It’s about the Cicero,” she said; “I wanted to tell you about that first lesson, and how it happened that I didn’t answer the question you asked me.”

There was no doubt about his recognition now. The great face lighted with a sudden interest, and his eyes looked searchingly into hers. “That’s right,” he said quickly; “I’m glad you have come;” and then he waited for her to go on.

“I suppose I ought to have told you everything at first,” she began. “I really didn’t mean to deceive you. At least—at least,” her voice began to falter, “I didn’t think it was anything so very bad.”

The look in his eyes grew sterner. Perhaps he thought her conscience was not yet fully awake, but she went on swiftly. “You see it was this way. There wasn’t any class in Latin that was just right for me to go into. I had never read anything but Andrews’ Reader. I had studied



Latin all by myself, except for one term when the teacher taught me after school. It was a district school, but we had a student from college sometimes in the winter. When you said there was no class in Cæsar or Sallust, it frightened me for a minute, and then I just made up my mind that I'd go into the Cicero if I could. It seemed so dreadful to go back over what I had studied, when I could only be here for one term!"

There was a pleading tone in her voice, but the look in his eyes did not soften. It grew even sterner, though the sternness was mingled now with an obvious surprise. Possibly he thought she was making a plea in extenuation of her offence in connection with that first lesson. It seemed to Sue that he might have said just a word, but she did not wait for it. She went on more pleadingly than before.

"I didn't *say* I was ready for Cicero. When you asked me the question, I honestly would have told you, but just then a boy came in and interrupted, and after that you took it for granted without my saying a word. I didn't mean to deceive you, truly I didn't, but I was so glad to be in the class, and I thought you wouldn't mind



if I got the lessons." She choked back a great lump that rose in her throat, and added, "That was why that first lesson was so fearfully hard for me."

"I should think so," ejaculated Mr. Hermon, and a grim little ghost of a smile flitted for a moment across the sternness of his face.

"It was so hard," she went on, "that I worked for two days to get it. The constructions were so new, and the thought so different from anything I had ever had, that it seemed sometimes as if I should *never* get it. But I couldn't give it up. Somehow it seemed to me that I should be beaten for all my life if I did."

Mr. Hermon started, and the grim little ghost of a smile flashed suddenly into a quick, sharp question. "Then you *did* get it? Do you mean to tell me that you rendered that exceptionally fine translation by your own unaided efforts?"

"Oh yes, sir," she cried; "in the end I mastered it. Nobody helped me. And I tried to put it into the best words I could, it seemed so beautiful."

Mr. Hermon's face was a study. "My dear young lady!" he ejaculated; and then he burst



out, "But I don't understand it yet. Why didn't you tell me this in the class? Why did you hang your head, and allow me to put the construction I did upon your silence?"

His voice was almost fierce, as if he felt himself the victim of some strange injustice.

"Oh, don't you see?" she cried, clasping her hands; "I thought if I told you how much time I had spent on that lesson, you would know, and all the rest would know, that I had come into the class without being in the least fit for it, and that I ought not to be there at all. It never came into my mind that you *could* think that other thing." There was a sob in her voice as she ended, "and all this time I thought you understood, and were displeased with me for not telling you the real truth at the beginning. I do think now that I ought; but won't you please forgive me, and let me go on with the class?"

Never was a more pleading young face lifted to a teacher's than Sue Orcutt lifted at that moment to the principal of Merton Academy. Strange to say, Mr. Theophilus Hermon turned his back suddenly upon it, and made a complete circuit of the room before he answered her. Twice during the



circuit he cleared his voice, and once he blew his nose in a portentous manner. When he came back to where she stood, he put out his hand, and the expression with which he looked down at her turned Merton Academy into heaven indeed.

“My dear Miss Orcutt,” he said, and Sue thought she had never in her life heard a voice as sweet as his, “if you had been a teacher, as I have, for forty years, you would know how much easier it was for me to think ‘that other thing’ — we will keep your own phrase for it — than to guess the truth as you have just disclosed it. It is the only apology I can make for the extraordinary injustice I have done you. May you go on with the class? Well, I think so. I will even forgive you for keeping your secret at the first, for I should probably have forbidden your making the attempt, and that would have cost you the victory you have won, and me the delight of knowing it. Ah, my dear young lady, such happiness as you have given me this evening doesn’t come too often in a schoolmaster’s life. It’s something to make him love his work the better, and feel, as he always ought, that there’s none in all God’s world which is better worth the doing.”



He was silent for a minute, his great face beaming down at her with a benignity which seemed to annihilate all the griefs and troubles of the world. Then he said in a lighter tone, "But come, I'm not going to let you work too hard, for all your splendid courage. How would you like to sit down and let me read you the whole oration? We could enjoy it together, and I'm not afraid of your being hurt by it in the least."

She winced involuntarily, and he laughed a quick, pleased little laugh. "Ah, I see you don't want to lose the pleasure of getting it all out by yourself. Well, I should have felt that way too at your age. All right; but don't fail to let me help you, if you find any passage taking too much of your time in these first days. It will grow easier with every lesson, you may be sure of that."

He stood for a minute longer, then added, lifting his finger as if to impress it on her memory, "And some evening you must come to see me in my own house. I want to know all about your coming to the Academy, and how it happens that you can only stay one term. You and I must know each other better."

Sue did not dare to speak. A single word



and her cup of happiness would have spilled over in a shower of blissful tears. They walked out of the Academy together, and parted at the foot of the steps that led down to the street. Several times Sue looked back and saw him climbing the hill in his slow fashion, his heavy, stooping figure a silhouette against the radiant moonlight. For her own part, her heart was so light that it was positively hard to keep her feet on the ground. She wanted to fly, to sing, to throw her arms around somebody and shout for joy.

Miss Graham and Bertha were in the room when she entered. The lamp was burning at full height now, and showed her sister looking positively ill with anxiety, and the little dress-maker evidently not quite at ease. Sue did not wait for either of them to ask a question.

"It's all right," she cried rapturously, and the story followed as fast as her half-breathless state would allow.

"I knew it would be like that when he understood," said Miss Graham, when the girl had finished. "Didn't I tell you what sort of a man he is?"



"No, you didn't half tell me. Nobody could," replied Sue. "I think he's the kindest man I ever saw, the kindest and the grandest; and his face is positively beautiful when he smiles right at you. Oh, I never, never was so happy in all the days of my life."

Miss Graham laughed. She felt that it was time now for her to leave the sisters to themselves, especially as, in another moment, they both began to tell her how grateful they were for her coming in.

"Well, I'm rather glad myself that I came," she said lightly, and she could not refrain from adding, with a mischievous glance at Sue, "It isn't the first time I've seen girls in this room that needed cheering up. They do get into the clutches of Giant Despair now and then, in spite of themselves!"

Sue bit her lip for an instant, then she retorted, with a glance as merry as Miss Graham's own, "It wasn't Giant Despair; I haven't been asleep on his grounds. I tell you it was Apollyon himself, and he fell upon me when I was marching along as stoutly as I knew how."

The little dressmaker laughed. "Well, which-



ever of them 'twas, I hope he won't pounce on you again; and all the same I'm glad I came in."

"So am I! So am I!" cried both the girls heartily, and Sue added in the reckless joy of her heart, "Come and take tea with us next Saturday evening. I'm to be cook for the week, you know, and I shall want to celebrate my triumphs."



## CHAPTER XI.

SUE TAKES HER TURN AS HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD.

“YOU needn’t give a thought to the cooking this week,” Sue said to Bertha on the following Monday. “You’ve had a great deal more than your share of the work and responsibility so far, but it’s my turn to stand at the helm now, and we’ll even things up.”

She was feeling as light-hearted as possible. The lesson in Cicero that morning had removed the last trace of the late unpleasantness. Mr. Hermon had not only called on her to translate the first passage, but had treated her with so marked a graciousness, that whatever explanation the class could find for the change in his attitude, it must have been evident to all that she had been taken without reserve into his favor and confidence. She felt that she could enter now upon her duties as head of the household without the slightest weight upon her spirits, and she was re-



solved that her administration should not fall a whit below that of her sister.

It was the general custom among the students at Merton to do most of their studying at the Academy, but it was always optional with them to remain at their rooms between recitations if they chose, and Sue was glad that afternoon to avail herself of the privilege. She wished to inaugurate her reign as cook in a suitable manner, and had determined that the dinner that night should be something quite out of the ordinary. She would have a beefsteak broiled in the toasting-rack over the coals, some mashed potato beaten to a cream, a piece of one of those delicious winter squashes whose shells were so hard that they had to be broken with a hatchet, and for dessert,—at this point Sue felt her ambition soar,—for dessert she would have apple pie and cheese! She had never made a pie, but what of that? There must be a first time for everything.

It dampened her ardor for a moment to find that there was no receipt for pastry in her mother's little cook-book, but on reflection she decided that the omission, if it indicated anything, only showed the making of a pie to be a mere



matter of instinct, and with this consoling thought she entered boldly upon her task. A pan of Rhode Island Greenings was brought from the cellar, and the paring and slicing were done in a truly artistic manner. It was well to have the apple in readiness before making the crust; she was aware of that. As for the crust itself, a question as to the amount of flour required gave her some perplexity at the very outset, but she remembered that good pie crust was always thin, and with this fact for a pointer, decided to take "only a little." It was probably not far from a quart which she sifted into the bottom of the big mixing-bowl! A lump of firm, white lard deftly rubbed into it, that was the next thing, she knew, and then came the water. She was not sure whether it should be hot or cold, and to prevent a mistake in either direction, decided to take it lukewarm. The quantity of so mild an ingredient she presumed did not much matter, and she poured in a generous supply. The mixing after this was quickly accomplished, but to extricate her hand when the operation was finished was not so easy. Somehow, the soft, sticky stuff glued all her fingers together, and could not be squeezed, or



shaken, or wriggled off. Even the assistance of the other hand did not much facilitate matters, for what she succeeded in getting off of one stuck persistently to its fellow. However, it was accomplished at last by the aid of a knife, which, it is needless to say, was daubed to the end of the handle.

But the true perversity of pie crust had only just begun to disclose itself. The way it spread over the board, and smeared the rolling-pin when she attempted to shape a portion of it into a circle could only be accounted for, at first, on the theory of the total depravity of inanimate objects. But Sue had a philosophic mind, and it presently occurred to her that possibly the mixture might be a little too soft. If this were the case, the addition of flour would certainly remedy it. She put it in by the handful, and the amount absorbed was truly surprising. Finally, the precious compound lost its gluey texture. It even assumed a consistency resembling india-rubber, and manifested a disposition to bound back under the strokes of the rolling-pin. This, Sue presumed to be the correct thing, but the quantity of pie crust which she now had in stock was something appalling. She had started out with the modest intention of mak-



ing a single pie, but when one was produced, it appeared, even to her inexperienced eye, that she had crust enough left for at least three more. To waste it was out of the question, and she consoled herself with the thought that it would at least simplify cooking for the rest of the week if there were plenty of pies on hand. Bertha, she was sure, would appreciate her forethought.

She rushed down stairs for more apples, and the paring and slicing were done this time with an eye to speed, not artistic effect. By dint of effort she contrived to get three more pies onto the pans, the labor consisting for the most part in rolling out of the crust, as the furnishing of the inside had been from the first a comparatively simple matter. A generous supply of apple, well covered with sugar, and sprinkled with nutmeg, this, she was sure was all that was needed. But the exasperating thing was the way that pie crust held out. After all this, a lump of it, nearly as large as the girl's fist still graced the moulding-board. She looked at it with an eye of despair. It was almost time for the chapel exercise at which all the students were required to be present, and there was positively no more time to be spent



now in the construction of pies. She decided, with a groan, to leave it till her return and then shape it into a couple of "turnovers." That, at any rate, would make an end of it.

There was barely time to wash her hands and bathe her hot, red face, before the chapel bell began to ring, and it was only the undignified rate at which she hurried through the streets which saved her from being tardy. Bertha was in the room before her, but she did not try to secure a place at her side. There were reasons for preferring a seat nearer the door, from which she could make her exit as soon as possible when the exercises were ended. She had left the pantry in a frightful state, and it seemed to her that she *must* get things straightened, and those pies into the oven before her sister's return. In their unbaked state they certainly were not handsome, but there was no telling what the process of cooking might do in the way of beautifying.

Mr. Hermon's amen had hardly sounded before she was out of her seat, and no time was lost on the way back to the scene of her labors. The fire, which she had forgotten to replenish, was nearly out, but she rebuilt it with an amount of kindling



and dry wood which soon brought it to a roaring pass. This took time, however, and in a sudden fit of desperation she decided not to make the "turnovers," after all. Instead, she flung the remainder of the pie crust into the stove. It was an act of destruction for which she felt that she should be held accountable, but the impulse was irresistible. Then she hurried the pies into the oven, and applied herself with such energy to the pantry that she had succeeded in scraping the remnants of the pastry from the board onto the floor and her apron, before Bertha made her appearance.

"You must have been in a terrible hurry to get here," remarked that young lady, as she entered the room. "You disappeared like a flash when the exercises were over."

"Well, I *was* in something of a hurry to get back," replied Sue calmly; "I had some baking to attend to," and she trusted that the statement would impress Bertha with a suitable sense of her zeal as cook.

Bertha did seem to be somewhat impressed. "What have you been making?" she asked eagerly. But at that moment her attention was suddenly attracted to the pan of apple parings which



Sue had injudiciously left in full sight on the table, and the spectacle seemed fairly to overcome her.

“Sue Orcutt!” she exclaimed, “where on earth did you learn to pare apples like *that?*” She held up one of the skins and added, with a gasp, “If mother should see the thickness of it!”

Sue winced. Apple parings half an inch thick were certainly inconsistent with the traditions of the Orcutt family. But she had been pressed for time, and under the circumstances it did seem rather hard that Bertha should call her to account. If she would make a point on a little thing like that, what would she say to the lump of pie crust which had been committed to the flames? The fear that she might somehow discover it through the bars of the stove, made Sue turn pale, and she fell to poking the fire with a zeal which, under the circumstances, seemed really superfluous.

“If your pie is in the oven,” said Bertha, diverted from the contemplation of the skins by this performance of her sister’s, “I don’t think I’d stir the fire any more now. The stove is red-hot, as it is.”



Sue laid down the poker. Her immediate fear had been relieved by the certainty that the pie crust was reduced to a cinder. The state of that in the oven had not yet begun to alarm her.

“I think I’ll go and get some water,” she said rather coldly, and she left the room, feeling that there were times when, with all her excellent qualities, Bertha was a little trying. She returned a few minutes later, and found that discreet elder sister on her knees beside the oven, gazing in at the open door with a petrified expression. Sue stooped and looked over her shoulder, and any hope she had entertained that the atmosphere of the oven would improve the appearance of that precious quartette of pies, vanished on the instant. They were badly burned already, but that was not the most striking thing in their appearance. The crust had risen on the top of every one of them in the most unprecedented manner, and they really looked more like four small loaves of bread than four good specimens of pastry.

“Why, what makes ’em do like that?” cried Sue, beginning to feel that the idiosyncrasies of pastry were past finding out. “Did you ever see pies look that way before?”



"Not exactly," said Bertha dryly. She seemed to be struggling with some unusual emotions, and it was several seconds before she added, in a tone scrupulously polite, "Perhaps the reason they puff up so is because you didn't make any holes in the upper crust to let out the air. You ought to have pricked them, you know, or cut a nice little figure in the top, as mother sometimes does."

Sue groaned. She remembered now that she had seen her mother perforate the crust of pies, but she had always supposed it was done simply in the way of decoration. She was meditating on this unlucky omission of hers, when a new mystery disclosed itself. Bubbles of juice issued suddenly from the edge of one of the nearer pies, and spread themselves, hissing and sputtering, over the bottom of the oven.

"Mercy!" cried Sue, "are they all going to do that? Why, there won't be any of the goodness left in them. What in the world is the matter?"

Bertha maintained an imperturbable calmness. Apparently she was past the point of being surprised. "I *have* seen pies do that before," she said after a moment, and Sue felt that the admission was truly kind. Then she added, "But



I should think by the looks of these pies that you put more apple into them than you ought, and perhaps you forgot to wet the edges of the crust. Mother usually does that, to make them stick together, when the apples are particularly juicy."

Sue sunk helplessly back on the floor. "Oh," she groaned, "to think there should be so many tricks and turns in the making of a pie! To think I've eaten 'em all my life and never realized what a triumph of mind over matter the making of even the simplest sort is! Why, I actually thought anybody could do it."

"So you can when you know how," said Bertha, and she could not refrain from adding, "I must say, Sue, I think you launched in rather boldly to make so many at the first venture."

"I thought while I was making I might as well make a plenty," said Sue rather sulkily.

"Well, but four pies are such a lot for two people to eat all by themselves," persisted Bertha. "We are not likely to want more than half a one at a meal, and at that rate they'll last more than a week if we have them for dinner every day."

"We often had 'em three times a day at home,"



said Sue doggedly; "I don't see why you've taken such a spite against pies, all of a sudden."

If she had not added the last remark, Bertha might have spared her; but this was too much. "I should think you *would* know," she retorted, pointing at the four monstrosities in the oven. "We never had such pies as *those* at home three times a day."

She had grave doubts whether they could ever eat one of them, and she felt that the occasion demanded plain speaking. It was only the beginning of the week, and if Sue was going to do cooking of this sort, and on such a scale, the waste of good material would be frightful.

"Really, Sue," she went on impressively, "I think we ought to be careful how we go into things before we've had experience. If they don't come out right, there's just so much money wasted, and we can't afford that."

"Oh, I know it, I know it," said Sue, reduced at once by this form of argument. "And to tell the honest truth, I had no idea of making more than one when I began, but the crust held out so like the widow's cruse of oil that I just had to keep on for the sake of using it up."



She peered over Bertha's shoulder again, as she spoke, and the expression of those pies, all swollen and sputtering, was so irresistibly funny that she burst into a hysterical giggle; and Bertha, though she felt that it was ill-timed mirth, could not, after a moment, refrain from joining her.

"Oh, do shut up the oven door," Sue gasped at last. "It's perfectly killing, the way they look. I know I ought to be shedding tears of repentance for having produced such monstrosities, but laughing is the next thing to crying, you know, and this is positively the best I can do. I only hope they'll taste good. 'Handsome is that handsome does,' they say, and I suppose we *could* eat them with our eyes shut."

Bertha would really have liked to offer her sister some encouragement along this line, but imagination was not her strong point, and she could not conceive of pastry which looked like that in the oven, offering any great delectation to the inner man.

"Well, of course 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating,'" she said cautiously, and with this guarded statement she closed the oven door and left the pies to complete their baking.



Her forebodings in regard to their inward quality proved, in the end, to be only too well founded. The crust was so tough that it was impossible to dissect it without the resolute use of both knife and fork. It was discovered, too, that Sue had omitted to put in any salt, and the cutting of the second pie (which, as it happened, was the last one made) disclosed that in this the sugar was forgotten as well. Bertha ate a piece heroically, softening the crust with the aid of the cream pitcher, and adding the needed seasoning; but at this point Sue's soul revolted, and the first time she was alone in the room, she committed the remainder of the unlucky pastry to the fire. It was dreadful to burn up so much good material, she admitted humbly to Bertha after it was done, but she really thought the wear and tear of the human constitution in absorbing it ought to be taken into account, and, on the whole, the destruction of the pies was the lesser evil.

Her culinary ardor was considerably cooled by this first venture, and for the rest of the week Bertha had no reason to accuse her of immoderate zeal in providing delicacies for the table.

Indeed, the bill of fare speedily dropped down



to the two or three things which were easiest to prepare, and even these would not always have reached the table in a palatable condition, had it not been for the watchful care which Bertha privately exercised over their baking and boiling.



## CHAPTER XII.

### THE HOUSEKEEPER MAKES AN IMPORTANT PURCHASE.

“I SUPPOSE you remember, Sue,” said her discreet elder sister, as they sat at breakfast, on the Saturday morning of that interesting week, “that you invited Miss Graham to supper this evening.”

Sue started. “I declare I had forgotten it,” she said, “but it’s a fact, I did ask her. I remember, now you speak of it.”

“And, of course,” pursued Bertha, “we ought to have something out of the ordinary. People always expect that when they’re invited out to a meal.”

She did not remind Sue that the little dress-maker had been bidden to the feast for the express purpose of celebrating her culinary triumphs, but the flush which rose suddenly in her sister’s face suggested that her own memory had supplied the fact.



"Of course, of course," she said hastily. She had looked rather alarmed for the first few seconds, but it was characteristic of Sue that a real emergency always brought a swift revival of her courage. She took a large swallow of her crust coffee, and stiffened herself resolutely. "I'll devote myself to cooking this morning and see if I can't redeem my reputation," she said. "Really, Saturday is the only time when one has a fair show."

Bertha breathed an inaudible sigh. She had really thought of proposing to take her sister's place in the pantry, but clearly it would not do. Sue would probably consider it the unkindest cut of all.

"Well, I hope you'll get along all right," she said rather anxiously.

"Oh, I'll give my mind to it in good earnest, and you'll see what I can do," said Sue cheerfully. "Of course I made an awful business of those pies" (she could own up as handsomely as anybody when it came to that), "but I was working without a receipt, and everything went against me. I'll go by the book this time, and things'll come out different. You see if they don't."



She was not above taking advice, and the consultation into which she entered at once as to the kind of cake she had better make — for cake there must be, of course — had a reassuring effect on Bertha's spirits. A "Fairy Loaf," for which their mother's directions were full and explicit, was selected, and the four eggs for which it called were not grudged even by Bertha in the interest of company.

In the making of the salt rising bread, too, Sue showed her wisdom by asking assistance of her sister. If she had only requested that young lady to take the spoon into her own hand, and actually mix the sponge for that baffling product, which is really the despair of many excellent housewives, she would have been wiser still. It was prepared exactly by directions, but for some inscrutable reason — Bertha herself could not explain it — it did not act in the least as it did the Saturday before. The fine, white bubbles which should have risen to the surface till the whole was a light, foaming mass, failed to disclose themselves. Nothing rose but a watery fluid, which spread itself in a melancholy manner over the top, while the mixture itself assumed a yellow and jaundiced appearance,



which stood sullenly in the bowl at just the original mark.

Fortunately for Sue, she did not know for some hours that her bread was doomed to hopeless failure, and she occupied herself briskly meanwhile in the making of the cake. Never were ingredients put together with more scrupulous care. Never was cook more unsparing of labor in beating them all to an exquisite lightness. At one point only did her mother's directions fail of the most definite instruction: "Lastly, three cups of flour, *or if necessary, a little more.*" The last clause raised a question, and Sue was too intent on producing a cake of the most perfect quality to willingly act under the slightest doubt. Bertha was in the laundry, but even she was hardly to be considered authority on so nice a point, and Sue decided to appeal to Mrs. Porter, who was probably busy at this very hour with her own Saturday baking.

Poor Sue! it was the very irony of fate which sent her down stairs just then. Mrs. Porter was not in her kitchen, but the cooking materials on the table seemed to indicate that she was not far away. Sue decided to wait a little, and while she waited there came a knock at the door. To open



the door in response was a prompt and natural impulse. A stylish young man, with a rather handsome and remarkably ingenuous countenance, stood at the threshold.

"Is Mrs. Porter in?" he asked, quite with the air of an old acquaintance, lifting his hat gracefully as he spoke.

"No," said Sue, "but I presume she will be very soon. I'm waiting for her myself." She hesitated a moment, and added, "Won't you come in?"

"Well, I don't know but I will, just for a few moments," said the young man. "I should be sorry to miss seeing her, and for that matter," he added, with a beaming smile, "she'd be sorry to miss seeing me."

"A friend of the family," thought Sue, and she made haste to suggest that perhaps he would step into the parlor.

"Oh, let me have a seat right here," said the young man affably; "I'm always glad of the chance to sit down in a good, old-fashioned kitchen; it makes me feel at home. I guess you're one of the Academy girls," he continued, apparently feeling it incumbent upon him to engage in conver-



sation; and as Sue assented, he added cordially, "Well, I used to be a student here myself. Nice old place. Never saw a place I liked better, nor a nicer set of folks. That's the reason I'm here now, though it's a little out of my beat, and something of a sacrifice in a pecuniary way,—I may as well own that. You see my business is of a kind that I can naturally make more money at in the cities, but I feel such an interest in this place, specially the students, that I felt as if I must put in one day here, if I couldn't any more."

A light dawned suddenly upon Sue's mind. Probably this self-sacrificing individual was a book agent. Even with her small knowledge of the world, she thought she detected signs which marked him as belonging to that class.

He seemed to have guessed her thought, for he said instantly, with a pleasant laugh, "Oh, 't isn't books! I wouldn't waste my time that way, specially in a place where there's such a library as there is at Merton. Fact is, the best books are all old, and if folks don't know what to read, why, it's their own fault, and there's no use in other folks going round to tell 'em."

It struck Sue that this sentiment was not alto-



gether bad. "No," he continued emphatically, "I've got more important business on my hands than *that*. It's this new invention of Edison's, this discovery of his for preventing the consumption of oil in lamps. You've heard of it of course."

"No, I don't think I have," said Sue, searching her memory.

"You haven't!" exclaimed the young man, who apparently found the statement almost too much for his credulity; "why, it's been in all the papers! I guess you haven't been reading 'em much lately."

Sue admitted the fact, adding apologetically that she had been too busy with her studies.

"Well, that explains it," said the young man. "And yet," he added after a moment, evidently revolving the fact still in some bewilderment, "it's queer you haven't heard Mr. Hermon speak of it. They say he's making such a fad of chemistry lately. But then he's getting old, and I suppose he misses something now and then. I'm awfully sorry though, for I supposed he would have explained it all from a scientific standpoint, and I should have nothing to do but introduce it. It's undoubtedly the greatest discovery of the age, and so uncommonly handy for students."









SUE MAKES A PURCHASE.



He really seemed quite cast down over Mr. Hermon's unaccountable omission, and Sue, whose curiosity was by this time considerably piqued, could not refrain from saying, "I don't understand, I'm sure; what is it?"

"Don't you?" said the young man, arousing himself from his dejection with an apparent effort; "well, I'll show you. It's the simplest thing in the world, so simple that all the scientific men are kicking themselves for not having thought of it years ago."

He thrust his hand into his pocket as he spoke, and drew out a small package, which, on being opened, disclosed a dozen lampwicks, which, except for a slight reddish color, presented nothing unusual in their appearance.

"Look just like common ones, don't they?" he said, smiling at Sue in his most ingenuous manner.

Sue admitted that she could see no radical difference.

"I thought you'd say so," exclaimed the young man delightedly. "You wouldn't know 'em from the old-fashioned kind. But I tell you there's a big difference when you come to use 'em."

"How?" queried Sue, getting really excited.



"How?" repeated the young man impressively. "Well, I'll tell you. If you should put one of these wicks into a lampful of oil, you could burn that oil for ten days without having to replenish it."

Sue looked incredulous, and he reiterated, "A lampful of oil, with this kind of a wick, will burn four times—yes, more than four times—as long as it will with the ordinary sort."

"But what makes it?" demanded Sue; "I don't see why the kind of wick you use should make any difference."

"Ah," said the young man, smiling in a rapturous manner, "there's where the great discovery comes in. This wick"—he lifted one of them, and his manner grew solemn—"has been treated with chemicals in such a way that it acts upon the essential properties of the oil, and prevents it from being consumed in the burning."

Sue thought of Moses and the burning bush. That, she remembered, had burned without being consumed. Still, it had always been counted a miracle, and it was generally conceded that the day of miracles was past.

"I don't see how it's possible," she said firmly.



“Does the lamp give as much light as it does the other way?”

“Just exactly,” said the young man fervently, “or if anything, a little more. I don’t know as I can make the scientific reason quite clear to you” —he paused, and knit his forehead for a moment, as if in an attempt to find language which would be equally lucid and simple, then exclaimed with animation, “Have you studied chemistry, and do you understand all about oxygen, and the chloric action of the bisulphide of nitrogen?”

“No,” said Sue regretfully; “I haven’t got as far as that yet.”

“Well,” said the young man in a tone which was equally regretful, “then I don’t know as it’s really worth while for me to try to explain it to you. But facts are facts, and there’s no getting round ’em. You can see for yourself what an important discovery it is, and what ’twould be worth to you to have one of these wicks in your lamp.”

It certainly was obvious that a wick which would perform the marvel the young man had indicated would meet a long-felt want. The consumption of oil was no inconsiderable item in the girls’ household expense, and besides, if there was one



part of the work which Sue hated with a deadly hatred, it was filling lamps and trimming wicks. Her face probably expressed her train of thought, for the young man said responsively:

“Don’t I know how ’tis? Why, I was a student here myself in the old days, boarded myself too, and the lamp was the meanest thing in the whole business. You see I was one of the kind that *would* get my lessons, if it took the midnight oil to do it, and midnight oil counts up. That is, it does with the old kind of a wick; but with this sort you could study all night, if you wanted to, and the lamp would scarcely show the next morning that it had been lighted at all. I tell you it’s a wonderful discovery. Nothing like it since the invention of the telegraph, and for ‘human nature’s daily food’ it beats that all hollow.”

Under ordinary circumstances it might have occurred to Sue that the young man’s figure was not altogether felicitous, but she scarcely noticed it now. She was inwardly debating whether she had not better purchase one of these invaluable wicks at once.

“What is the price?” she asked, taking up one of them and looking at it fondly.



"Fifty cents," said the young man promptly. "The usual price is a dollar, but I said to myself when I came to Merton, that I'd sell 'em to the students at half price, just for the sake of old times, if it broke me all up to do it."

Sue's face had lengthened. "Fifty cents is an awful price to pay for a lamp wick," she said gravely. "The common ones only cost a cent apiece."

"I know it," said the young man, "but how many of 'em do you use in the course of a term, and how would fifty cents sound as the price of your winter's supply of kerosene? Just look at it that way, and *then* tell me if fifty cents is high."

This really seemed a fair way of putting it. Sue's fingers tightened upon the wick, and her expression grew resolute. It was her prerogative as housekeeper to make purchase of anything she thought necessary for the household during this week, and the opportunity seemed really providential. She considered for a moment whether she had not better call Bertha into counsel, but on second thought decided to keep the matter a secret, and surprise her sister the next morning with the



sight of a lamp whose oil had not wasted in the course of an evening's use.

"I'll take one," she said decidedly.

"I knew you would," said the young man; and he added jocosely, "You think they come high, but you must have one."

"No," said Sue, lifting her eyes to his in the most candid manner, "on the whole I don't think they do come high. Taking everything into account, I think they're very cheap indeed."

"Well, that's the right way to look at it," said the young man heartily, "but one can always rely on good sense among the students at Merton Academy."

Sue was deeply gratified, but she only revealed it by a little added dignity of manner as she left the room in quest of her purse.

When she came back a minute or two later, the young man was standing by the window, beating a tattoo on the pane. "On the whole," he said, "I guess I won't wait for Mrs. Porter. Fact is, I'm in an awful hurry, can't spend but one day here, and I guess I'll go right up to Mr. Hermon and get him to put it down in black and white about the chemical part. 'Twould save lots of time in explanation."



“Well, I think that’s a real good plan,” said Sue cordially. “People do like to understand a thing before they buy it.”

“Of course,” said the young man; and then he added lightly, “but for that matter, you’ll feel as if you understood it all right when once you’ve seen it work.”

He smiled one of his brilliant smiles, as he dropped her half-dollar into his pocket, then remarked, “By the way, if you’d just as lief, I hope you won’t say anything to Mrs. Porter about the price you paid. It’s a special, you know, to students.”

Sue did not feel called upon to make any promises, but it should be remarked, in passing, that she did not, after that day, feel the least inclination to reveal the secret.

When he had gone, she decided that she, too, would not wait for Mrs. Porter. Probably she had “run in” to one of the neighbors’ houses, and might not be back for some time. The invaluable purchase she had just made had raised her spirits, and she decided to trust to her own judgment in the matter of the cake. She be-thought herself that one could always bake a



little of the dough as a trial loaf, and that her mother had put a tiny dish into their outfit for that special purpose.

She used it on her return to the upper room, and the result was so satisfactory that she entrusted the larger loaf to the oven without anxiety. Then she applied herself to adjusting the new wick in its appropriate place. Bertha had cleaned the lamp that morning with special care, and it was disagreeable business pulling out the long, well-saturated wick and coaxing the new one into its place. She consoled herself, however, with the thought that this kind of work would not have to be done again for a long, long while, and the same thought sustained her while she scrubbed and re-scrubbed her hands in the effort to destroy the odious smell which her labors had left.

It was well that the operation did not absorb any more of her time than it did, for the cake was much in need of attention when she opened the oven door. The edges were already a little too brown, and the centre had risen in a volcanic manner. However, the watchful care which she bestowed on it during the rest of its baking,



prevented any real disaster, and it was removed from the oven at last looking fairly well.

By this time it was clear, even to Sue, that the bread was a failure. She was stirring the sponge mournfully when Bertha returned from her work in the laundry, and this time the latter was truly sympathetic.

“Never mind, Sue,” she said, after expressing her utter inability to see why it should behave so; “we can get along without it for to-night. We can have some cream-tartar biscuits. I’ll make them, if you want me to,” — she offered the suggestion very gently, — “and they’re always nice for company. Really, I don’t think we need to worry about the supper. I’m sure the cake is nice, and we can have some of mother’s quince preserve, and sweet pickles, and some chipped beef if you like. Besides,” she added, with true housewifely instinct, “we’ll put on the best table-cloth and that little fringed mat that always looks so pretty.”

Sue’s spirits rose at once. They were of an elastic sort, and the rebound was not difficult. Still she could not refrain from a sigh, as she looked at the refractory sponge which was never to develop into wholesome bread.



“If it wasn’t for wasting all that flour in addition to what I squandered on the pies!” she said remorsefully. And then she thought of the lamp wick and was comforted. That, at least, was something in the line of true economy, and she felt that its purchase would remain forever as a bright spot in the week’s experience.



## CHAPTER XIII.

SUE CELEBRATES HER TRIUMPHS, AND THE LITTLE  
DRESSMAKER GIVES HER FRIENDS SOME GOOD  
ADVICE.

MISS GRAHAM came early to supper that night. She had paid her hostesses the compliment of changing her ordinary dress for a soft black silk, a little shiny, but distinctly genteel, in which, with a cherry ribbon at her throat, she looked fairly young and pretty.

“You didn’t set the time for tea, when you asked me to come,” she said, with one of her bright little nods at Sue, “but I thought I’d be on the safe side. I believe it’s considered a high crime and misdemeanor for an invited guest to arrive at anybody’s table late. I heard a lady scolding the other day about somebody who had spoiled her whole dinner by coming a quarter of an hour behind time, and I think she intended to scratch his name off her list. I didn’t want that to happen to mine, you may be sure.”



She had taken her old place, in the rocker before the fire, and she smiled a little, observing that it was Sue who drew a chair to her side, and Bertha who flitted about adding the final touches to the table.

"I hope the Latin has gone all right this week," she continued, "and that you've had no more bouts with that particular adversary of yours."

Sue laughed. "Oh dear, no. Everything moves as smoothly as possible now. Mr. Hermon calls on me to recite every day and seems to rely on me for the most knotty passages. I'm only afraid he has too high an opinion of my abilities."

Miss Graham nodded. "That's the penalty for getting the first lesson the way you did. It's dangerous to make a record of that sort unless you're prepared to live up to it."

"Well, unless something happens to me that I don't know of now, I guess I can," said Sue rather proudly. And then she added, "I wouldn't disappoint Mr. Hermon when he looks at me the way he does, for anything in the world. It's worth everything to feel that he counts on me so."



Her eyes shone, and there was a tender little thrill in her voice as she said it. Somehow Miss Graham had come so close to that old trouble of hers that it was easy to take her into her happiness now.

The supper was ready, and Bertha interrupted the tête-à-tête at this point by inviting their guest to the table, with a courtesy which had a pretty little touch of dignity in it, and quite suggested the lady to the manner born. She had been right in saying that there was no need of worrying over the meal. Everything looked as dainty as possible. The biscuits would have tempted the veriest epicure; the dried beef—a product of the farm on which the deacon especially prided himself—was shaved to the most exquisite thinness; the cake was white and delicate, and the dishes of preserve, clear as amber, which were set by each plate, gave the finishing touch to the simple little feast.

“Oh, how good everything looks!” said Miss Graham, “and how good everything *is*!” she added a little later, when she had sipped her tea (they had bought five cents’ worth of Oolong for the occasion) and eaten one of the delicious biscuits. “I’m sure I never tasted better biscuits



than these ;” and she added, glancing at Sue, “There’s no need of asking how you succeeded as cook after such a demonstration.”

Sue flushed a little, and Bertha began to say something on a different topic, but she was not allowed to finish. Sue had no notion of appropriating a compliment which did not belong to her. “I think myself the biscuits are tremendously good,” she said, helping herself to a second, “but I didn’t make them. I started to make some salt rising bread, but concluded to stop with the yeast. It was Bertha who produced these, and you can make your bow to her, if you please.”

Somehow the little dressmaker did not look very much surprised. Bertha glanced reprovingly at her sister, and then added quickly, “But Sue made the cake. It’s a great deal harder to make cake than biscuits.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Miss Graham ; “I’ve tried my hand at both in my time, and if I remember correctly I never made a very brilliant success of either. But tell me how you’ve gotten along through the week,” she added, turning a merry look on Sue. “I want



to hear all about your experiences. I suppose you've made pies and that sort of thing."

The girls exchanged glances across the table. It had been no part of Sue's intention to reveal the story of those pies. She had extorted a promise from Bertha that she would never divulge it, even in the bosom of the family, but the little dressmaker's intuitions were alarmingly clever, and the twinkle in her eyes was somehow irresistible. Sue encountered it, and her purpose of keeping eternal silence suddenly melted.

"It's no use, Bertha," she said; "I may as well own up right here and now. Somehow, I feel in my bones that Miss Graham will discover it if I don't, and anyhow 'an honest confession is good for the soul.'"

She launched into the story in her liveliest style, omitting nothing, not even the lump of pie crust which had been consigned to the flames, and Miss Graham laughed until she choked, Bertha joining now and then, and Sue herself adding the final explosion as she tried to describe the outward aspect and the true inwardness of those remarkable pies.

"I only wish you'd kept one of them for this



occasion," said Miss Graham when the tale was finished; "I really don't think 'twas treating me quite fairly that you didn't."

But Sue shook her head decidedly. "You needn't hold any grudge against me on that score," she said. "You can laugh over those pies a good deal more comfortably than you could if you were trying to masticate a piece of one of them. No, there was no help for it; I had to make a burnt offering of them all to propitiate my evil genius."

She breathed a little sigh, thinking for the fiftieth time of all that "waste of good material." Then she remembered the lamp wick, which she had quite forgotten in the enjoyment of her chatting with Miss Graham, and her glance turned instinctively towards the lamp.

Did her eyes deceive her? The oil which had filled it to the socket a half an hour ago stood a full inch lower in the large glass globe. She checked herself in the exclamation which almost passed her lips, but there was no checking the look which leaped suddenly into her eyes. The expression of Macbeth when he saw the ghost of Banquo could hardly have been more full of consternation.

"What's the matter?" cried Bertha in astonish-



ment; and Miss Graham added, "I hope your evil genius hasn't risen of a sudden and refused to accept the sacrifice."

"Upon my word, I believe it has," gasped Sue. She gulped down her cup of tea in the effort to hide her confusion, but the eyes of Miss Graham and her sister were upon her when she set down the cup. She tried to escape them, and her own wandered with helpless fascination back to the oil in that lamp. There was no mistaking the fact. The oil was being consumed in exactly the same manner as before the introduction of that marvelous wick. The certainty that she had been the victim of a bare-faced swindle, and the desire to keep the abominable fact a secret, rushed upon her at the same instant, and she pulled herself suddenly together in the effort to appear calm.

But it was too late. Bertha's eyes were upon the lamp now, and her expression had become curious. "I wonder what makes that wick so red!" she exclaimed. "I never saw one look that way before."

She turned to Sue as she spoke, and the face of the latter suddenly became a number of shades redder than the wick. "Perhaps — it's — the —



kind," she faltered helplessly; "I put in a new one this morning."

She could not have exposed her secret more fatally. "You put in a new one!" ejaculated Bertha. "Why, I put in one myself. Sue Orcutt, what in the world is the meaning of this, and what makes you look so strangely?"

There was no help for it now, and Sue was forced a second time to become the reporter of her own blundering fortunes. But this was no merry recital. She had not gotten far enough away from the experience yet to see anything funny in it, and tears of vexation stood in her eyes, as she recounted the way in which the young man of the ingenuous countenance had imposed upon her credulity. She had forgotten the chemical terms by which he had attempted to throw light on the wonderful invention, but it all seemed a fraud palpable enough in the presence of that lamp with its steadily diminishing oil.

"Sue Orcutt," said Bertha solemnly, when the recital was ended, "did you actually pay fifty cents for that thing?" And the expression of her forefinger, as she extended it towards the lamp, was somehow awful.



Sue hung her head. It certainly did seem incredible; but as the young man himself had said, facts were facts, and there was no getting round them.

“Bertha,” she said, in a tone of the most abject contrition, “I did. Oh wretched girl that I am! It was a big, round half-dollar that I put into that villain’s pocket!”

A giggle from Miss Graham was all that saved the situation at this moment from becoming tragic. It gurgled irrepressibly across the stillness, and even in the depths of her humiliation Sue saw the affair in a pale gleam of humor. But not Bertha. She had reached the point where she could smile at the destruction of good material in the shape of apple pies, but this throwing away of actual cash was too much for her endurance.

“It is past my comprehension,” she began slowly, and the words dropped with telling effect, “how any human being —”

She paused, and Sue put in meekly, “who had an atom of common sense.”

“Who reasoned on the subject the least bit in the world,” pursued Bertha firmly, “could have been deluded into believing one word that fellow



said. Why, it was the most ridiculous humbug on the very face of it, and I should think you would have seen through it in an instant."

Sue felt that this was really going a little too far. She had been a fool of course, and had impoverished the family purse in a frightful manner, but she was not prepared to admit that the snare into which she had fallen was of quite so open a sort.

"Oh, it's easy enough to see through it now, when the whole thing is exposed," she said, rallying to her own defence; "but if you had heard that fellow talk and seen the way he looked, it would have been slightly different. Besides, the most wonderful things are always being invented. How could I know that it was impossible for a wick to be treated with chemicals in such a way as to prevent the oil from wasting? I really don't see as it would be any more astonishing than some things that *have been* invented."

"I should think," said Bertha with withering sarcasm, "that the person who had ingenuity enough for *that* would go a little farther, and discover some way of utilizing air instead of oil in lamps. I don't see any excuse for his stopping with a mean little wick."



Sue felt the sarcasm. "Well, I don't pretend to have a scientific mind," she said humbly, "and perhaps there really are some things too strange to happen. But when it comes to that, I must say it seemed to me more incredible that a person would go around, telling such lies, right out of whole cloth, than that somebody had invented that beautiful kind of a wick. It certainly would have met a long-felt want. Oh dear," she added, turning to Miss Graham with a profound sigh, "do you suppose anybody else was fool enough to buy one?"

"Lots of them, my dear," said Miss Graham cheerfully, "and people whose heads have been on their shoulders longer than yours. Really, I wouldn't feel so bad about it. We all get humbugged now and then. It's only a question of the kind of hoax that appeals to us. I don't think I should have been persuaded into buying one of those wicks" (her mouth twitched a little as she said it), "but I've done things just as foolish, and that cost me a good deal more. You'll have to set it down as so much paid for experience, and make the best of it."

Sue groaned. "Well, I suppose experience is



a good thing to have, at least some kinds, but I wish it didn't come so awfully dear. It breaks you all up paying for it, and other folks too, that's the worst of it," she added with a melancholy glance at Bertha.

Bertha was nothing if not forgiving. Her expression lost its severity, but it was still profoundly gloomy, and Sue's remorse grew even deeper.

"I've made a perfect failure of managing things this week," she went on, "and I believe 'twould give mother the nightmare to know all I've wasted. Well, it's no use crying over spilt milk; I only hope I shan't have such luck next time. I'll try my humble best; that's one thing certain."

Miss Graham sipped her tea for a minute in silence, then she set down her cup and looked at her young friends with an unusual seriousness. "Girls," she said, "what makes you divide up the work this way? Why don't you each take the part you can do best and stick to it?"

"Why, one part is harder than the other," exclaimed Sue quickly. "It wouldn't be fair to let Bertha carry the heavy end of the load all the time."



“Perhaps managing things, and doing the cooking, wouldn’t be the heavy end for her,” said Miss Graham. “I’ll venture to say this week has been harder for her than last.”

The quick dropping of Bertha’s eyelids revealed plainly enough that the clever little dressmaker had come very near the truth. “It’s the post of honor, to manage things of course,” she pursued resolutely, “and if Bertha should tell the real honest truth, I believe that’s the only reason why she doesn’t propose to keep it all the time, instead of taking turn about with you.”

Sue bit her lip, and her cheeks burned hotly. “You think because I made a failure this week that I always should,” she said, with a quiver of hurt feeling in her voice. “I know I’ve done as badly as possible, but I always thought if people didn’t succeed the first time in what they undertook, they ought to keep on trying till they did. I suppose you would have advised me to give up that Cicero lesson, when, at the end of the first few hours, I couldn’t make anything out of it.”

“Oh no, you don’t, my dear,” said Miss Graham, so gently that Sue felt instantly ashamed. She waited a moment, then went on with the same



resolute cheerfulness of tone, "I wish you girls would look at this thing in just a plain, common-sense way. Why, some people are good at one thing and some another, and I do believe that half the trouble in this world comes from people trying to do things that they are not fitted for at all."

"But how do we know what we can do, till we try?" interrupted Sue. "How did I know, for instance, that I could get that lesson? It was just hard work and keeping at it that carried me through."

Miss Graham smiled. "Do you feel, about doing the cooking, the way you felt about learning that lesson?" she asked quietly.

Sue hesitated, but only for a moment, and there was the gleam of a sudden illumination in her face as she answered with quick impulsiveness, "No, I don't. I cared more about getting that lesson than for anything else in this world. And I want to do the cooking, because—well, I guess it's pride—I hate to own up that I can't."

"Exactly!" cried the little dressmaker, with a glow in her eyes; "you see the difference. I tell you we can get light enough on what we're really



fit for, out of our own honest feeling, if we will. Depend upon it, the work we care most for is the work we can do best. I don't say you couldn't do the cooking,—I believe you could, if you set yourself to it in downright earnest,—but would it pay you to make the struggle? Here's Bertha, with every instinct of a born housekeeper, and here are you with scarcely a bit. Why, you can't turn a pancake without turning a phrase of your Latin at the same time, or stir up a Johnny-cake without stirring some ideas along with it that will maybe work into your next essay."

Sue stared. It was amazing how much the little dressmaker knew. She was on the point of saying so, but Miss Graham had not finished, and the words were warm on her lips.

"Don't think I'm saying that we should never do the thing we don't like. Sometimes we *have to do it*. Duty steps in now and then, and sets us some piece of work,—the very last one we wanted, perhaps,—in such a plain, unmistakable way, that we should be mean-spirited shirks if we turned away and left it. When that sort of an emergency comes, face it, I say, and do your honest best. But never do work that goes against the



grain when you can as conscientiously do something else. It doesn't pay you or anybody else."

There was a bright little spot burning in each cheek, and her eyes seemed doubly black in the earnestness with which she had spoken. There was a minute's silence, and then Sue said, in a tone from which the note of hurt feeling had wholly dropped away:

"Miss Graham, I believe you're our good angel; and as for me, a minute ago I behaved like a perfect goose. Bertha, if you'll consent to act as the undivided head of this establishment, I shall be heartily thankful. I'll do the washing every time, and sweep the rooms, and take care of the lamp,"—she stopped and made a grimace at the wick, then ended with all her old light-heartedness,—“and please don't imagine that I consider myself a martyr. I shall positively feel as if the old Man of the Sea had dropped off my shoulders if you'll agree to do the cooking from this time on.”

It was surprising how Bertha's face had lightened. “It's a bargain, with all my heart, Sue,” she said; “only I shan't let you do all the work you spoke of. That would be leaving the heavy end to you with a vengeance. And I must say,”



she added earnestly, "that I do think you've worked this week at a peculiar disadvantage. The only thing that has really been a test of your cooking is this cake, and that's lovely. Miss Graham, do have another piece!"



## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE GIRLS RECEIVE AN INVITATION.

AFTER this times were really prosperous with the student housekeepers. There were no longer any unpleasant complications in their work, either in class-room or kitchen, and they settled down to the quiet enjoyment of a term at Merton Academy, feeling that the stage of experiment was fairly past. To some young people the simple routine of the weeks that followed might have seemed a little monotonous, but the Orcutt girls did not need the spice of variety to give zest to the winter. They had come to the Academy for the express purpose of study, and as a matter of fact, few of the students at that old-fashioned school, whose sort unfortunately has passed somewhat out of vogue in these latter days, had come for anything else. They were for the most part a set of earnest, ambitious young people, whose minds were bent to the matter of getting an education with more than usual seriousness.



There was, of course, along with their study, more or less of social intercourse, but it was of an easy, natural sort, acquaintances being formed for the most part in the class-room, and extended generally at coasting and skating parties, for which the sharp New England winter furnished abundant opportunity. Here the boys could extend their gallantries to the girls, and they were by no means dull in finding other occasions; but Mr. Hermon's shrewd management had easily effected that these should not be too numerous, and the unwritten code of the school was unmistakably opposed to anything resembling flirtation.

After a mild fashion Bertha was rather fond of the social side of life, and her circle of acquaintance easily became much larger than that of her sister. She was, in a way, more accessible. An hour of freedom from work invariably meant for Sue an hour in the library, and an absent-minded air which usually hung about her outside of the class-room had given her associates the impression of a girl who was rather indifferent to ordinary friendships.

"I must say," Bertha remarked rather impatiently one day, when Sue had protested against



the "bother" of calling on a girl who had twice called on them, "I like to see something beside the lesson side of my friends," and Sue heard the statement with a dawning suspicion of the fact that for her that side really included the whole person.

The event which fairly brought her into social relations with the majority of her schoolmates occurred when the term had almost reached its half-way mark, and the occasion was the birthday party of Miss Alma Lynn. Alma was one of the students, the prettiest girl and perhaps the most popular in the whole Academy. She was the daughter of the richest man in Merton, a woollen manufacturer, whose mills supplied more than half the actual business of the place. She was an only child, but had somehow quite escaped the spoiling which often falls to the lot of such unfortunates. She was frank and generous, and her simple, unaffected manners and bright good nature made her a favorite with every one who knew her.

It was this fortunate young person whose sixteenth birthday fell on a certain Friday in January, and it was apparently necessary that something



should be done in the great house on Chestnut Street to celebrate the event. A week before it came to pass two notes, daintily addressed, one to Miss Orcutt, the other to Miss Susan Orcutt, were left by a messenger at Deacon Porter's door, the purport of each being that Miss Alma Lynn requested the company of the young lady whose name graced the cover, on the evening of January tenth, from half-past seven till eleven o'clock. To which surprising statement were added the mysterious letters "R. S. V. P."

The girls, who were studying when the notes arrived, laid down their books and opened them in a flutter of excitement.

"Why, we're invited to a party at Alma Lynn's!" exclaimed Bertha, when she had absorbed with her eyes the contents of hers.

"Yes," said Sue, rather solemnly. She had never been addressed in the third person before, and she had a queer feeling that the invitation was really designed for some other girl, to whom, in some occult way, she was expected to forward it.

But their combined wisdom was not equal to explaining the letters at the end, and for this, at the earliest possible moment, they had recourse



to the little dressmaker. Fortunately she came home that very evening, and they were not obliged to defer the question long.

“Why, it means that you are to send word as soon as possible whether you can go or not,” said Miss Graham. “Those letters stand for some French words, but I’ve forgotten what they are. I’m real glad you’re invited,” she added cordially. “It’ll be a tremendously nice affair.”

“Do you suppose all the students are invited?” asked Bertha.

“All that are in Alma’s classes, I guess,” said Miss Graham; “I know it’s to be a pretty large party. The plan was on foot when I was sewing there last week. You’ll go, of course.”

“I should like to immensely,” said Bertha, and she added, with her immediate instinct for practical details, “Are our brown cashmeres all right to wear?”

Miss Graham hesitated a moment. “They’re real nice dresses; but if you have any lighter ones, I should advise you to wear them,” she said frankly.

“Why?” demanded Sue, in a tone which was slightly combative.



“Well, it’s the way folks generally do, when they go to parties,” said the little dressmaker. She caught an argumentative gleam in the questioner’s eye, and went on, “There isn’t any right or wrong about it, of course. You can wear your Sunday-go-to-meeting gown, if you choose, and nobody’ll think the worse of you. But when people go out of an evening, for the express purpose of having a good time, they generally want to look as pretty as they can, and something light and dainty is considered the correct thing.”

It was certainly a straightforward statement of the fact, and perhaps the explanation was as profound as a philosopher could have made it.

“I have a cream-colored challis with a little blue sprig in it at home,” said Bertha reflectively. “It was made last summer, and is just as good as new. Would that do?”

“Just the thing!” said the little dressmaker, in high glee. “You ask your mother to send it up, and if it needs any extra touches, I’ll see that it gets ’em.”

She looked at Sue, who was apparently wrapped in her own meditations, and a new idea seemed suddenly to dawn upon her.



"Oh, girls!" she exclaimed, bringing her small, facile hands together, with a little clap, "I have a scheme!"

It was apparently a most beautiful scheme, for her bright, dark eyes danced with a sudden delight, and she beamed upon her young friends for a minute in the most rapturous manner before she attempted to disclose it.

"Well, if things don't come out just right when you wait long enough!" she exclaimed at last. "Here I've had the material for the softest, sweetest white dress lying in a drawer for years and years, and never knew what to do with it. Sue Orcutt, it's been waiting all this time for *you*, and you shall have it! I'll make it up in time for you to wear to that party."

"Oh, but I couldn't," exclaimed Sue, looking almost frightened, "I couldn't think of such a thing."

"Why?" demanded the little dressmaker, her own tone sounding now a little combative.

"Why — why, because it's yours, and I don't need it," said Sue resolutely.

"Oh, if you *needed* it!" said the little dressmaker impatiently. "If you *did*, I could under-



stand perfectly your refusing, but under the circumstances it's absurd."

Sue looked decidedly puzzled, and Miss Graham went on:

"Because in that case you *might* think I was offering it out of pity, and a body can't take presents *that way*. But you don't need it. You could wear that nice cashmere, or something you have at home, for aught I know, and be charming enough. There's only *one* reason in the world, and you know it, why I want to give you that dress."

She did not put the "one reason" into the one, short obvious word which would have expressed it, but it shone so unmistakably in her eyes at that moment, that Sue's involuntarily dropped.

"You see that cloth was given to me," pursued Miss Graham, with an odd little accent in her voice, "years ago — oh, I don't like to think how many — by a cousin of mine who went to sea. He brought it home to me after a voyage. I was young then, and wore pretty dresses, and went out like other girls. But something happened that changed everything, and I put the cloth away, — that and some other things, — and I never



had the heart afterwards to do anything with them. I'm too old now to wear white if I would, and I've often wondered what I should ever do with that cloth."

She stopped, and Sue said imploringly, "Miss Graham, it's ever so kind in you to want me to have it. Please don't think I don't appreciate it, but it's too much to take as a present. It is indeed."

Miss Graham leaned back in her chair and looked at Sue with a reproachful little smile. "And yet," she said, "you told me a few weeks ago—it's mean of me to bring it up, I know, but you're forcing me to it—that if you could ever do anything for me—"

"Oh," broke in Sue, protesting, "but that's the very trouble. It's *you* who would be doing for me again, and I have no chance at all at return."

Miss Graham made a despairing little gesture. "And yet you've been repeating ever since you were old enough to talk, and pretending to believe, that it's 'more blessed to give than to receive'; that it actually does make people happier. And now when you have the chance of giving me this very happiness, you won't let me



have it. Perhaps, in your heart, you don't even believe that verse is true."

Sue could not speak. She looked helplessly at the little dressmaker.

"Just put yourself in my place," said the latter pleadingly. "Wouldn't you like to do this thing if you were I, and I were you? Can't you conceive of its putting the sweetest sort of a pleasure into your life? Ah, my dear, if you really were in my place, you'd know how few pleasures of this sort come in my way."

The tears had sprung into Sue's eyes. "Miss Graham," she began impetuously —

"And yet," said the other, putting up her hand as if to stop the words before it should be too late, "if there isn't, down deep in your heart, a feeling for me that puts out the sense of obligation, and makes giving and receiving seem somehow all one thing, don't take it. It's the only ground on which you could afford to take it, and Heaven knows I love you too well to want you to."

The tears were fairly over the lids of Sue's eyes now. She bent suddenly and kissed the little dressmaker.



"My dear," said the latter (she was winking hard herself), "what an absurdly serious thing we're making of this trifle. Shall I cut the dress out Monday?"

She did it, of course, and in the end the making of the dress was the only point at which Sue felt in the least burdened by the acceptance of the beautiful gift.

"It does seem a little hard that you should have done all this work for nothing," she said wistfully, as she tried on the dress for the last time, and revolved slowly around for Miss Graham and Bertha to see if everything was exactly right. "It has taken away just so much money that you would have earned if you'd been working for anybody else."

"That's a fact," said Miss Graham cheerfully. "I could have made two dollars by working these two days for Mrs. Duffy, who is the fussiest woman in town. Between ourselves I consider it a special providence that I could plead this dress as a previous engagement. But if it will ease your mind any, my dear, why, you may pay me that two dollars, by and by, when you're sweeping in the shekels for yourself. On the whole, I



believe it would be rather nice to feel that I had that much coming to me in my old age."

Sue laughed. "Miss Graham," she cried, "I'll do it, and you shall take compound interest into the bargain."

She kept her word years after, and the rate of interest was of her own setting.



## CHAPTER XV.

### A TASTE OF SOCIETY.

THE eventful evening came at last. Great had been the excitement over it among the students at the Academy, and many were the consultations held at noons and recesses as to forms of acceptance and matters of dress and escort. Mr. Hermon would probably have objected to the affair, had it come on any other evening than Friday, and had "the founder of the feast" been any one except Alma Lynn. But that young lady had thrown the spell of her sweet good-nature around him as completely as around her school-mates, and she had had the tact not only to take him into her confidence as to this party at the very start, but even to secure his own promise to come.

It was the knowledge of this latter fact, which Alma made no secret, that sharpened Sue Orcutt's appetite for the affair more than anything else. A thousand times since that evening when



Mr. Hermon said, "We must know each other better," she had longed to see and talk with him outside the class-room, but she had never quite been able to summon the courage for a call at his own house, and no other opportunity had ever presented itself.

She wondered, with an odd fluttering of heart, as she and Bertha walked towards Alma's house that night, whether he would notice her in the company, and whether there would be any chance for conversation.

The great house was lighted from the top to the ground. It seemed to the girls they had never seen so many shining windows in one dwelling before, and they walked up the handsome stone steps with a feeling of awe which was not diminished when, at the first touch of the bell, a dapper young colored man threw open the door. There were little groups of people standing about in the hall and in the rooms which opened on either side, but no one seemed to observe their entrance, and they mounted the wide staircase with their eyes straight ahead, scarcely daring even to look at each other. It was a relief to find a number of girls whom they knew taking



off their wraps in the chamber to which they were directed, but the presence of the genteel-looking maid in a white cap, who assisted in the operation, was sufficient to keep all their voices at a very subdued pitch.

It was a beautiful room, — Alma's, one of the girls said, — and Sue wondered, with a sort of dazed feeling, if Alma actually did sleep every night in a room like that. But the wonder gave place to another the next moment, as she caught a glimpse of herself in a full-length mirror. Really, she had not known till that moment how well she looked in the new dress. It was so soft and graceful, and withal so simple and girlish, that the effect was charming, and she realized, with a sudden thrill of gratitude to the little dressmaker, how much easier it would be to adjust herself to the occasion in a dress like that, than it would have been in the sober brown cashmere. Bertha was looking charming too, in the dainty challis, to which Miss Graham had given a few of her most cunning touches, and somehow the awe of their surroundings half melted for them both in the consciousness that their own dress was in perfect keeping. But it wholly melted when Alma her-









THE ORCUTT GIRLS GO INTO SOCIETY.



self greeted them on their return to the lower floor. She was radiant in a white dress, which Sue inwardly pronounced not a bit prettier than her own, in spite of the exquisite lace at throat and sleeves; and her manner was so perfectly natural, so thoroughly cordial, that it would have been impossible for any one not hopelessly afflicted with self-consciousness, to feel awkward or frightened.

There were easy little introductions to her parents and a trio of Boston cousins who had come down for the occasion, and really within a few minutes the Orcutt girls had decided that a party of this sort was not half such a test of self-possession as one in a country parlor, where the young people slipped shyly into chairs set in a row around the walls, and waited timidly for each other to speak.

They did not realize,—as indeed no uninitiated person could,—the careful preparation, the exquisite attention given in advance to every detail, which made that party such a notable success; but a success they realized fully that it was.

There was no dancing or card-playing. In the former probably not one in five of the Academy



students could have joined, and as for the latter, Mr. Hermon's mortal dislike to it as a form of entertainment was too well known.

"Cards, Madam!" he had once said, with an awful frown, to a lady who asked if he had any objection to her inviting a few of his students to a euchre party. "Cards! They are the bane of society and the destruction of good conversation. If people *will* take to them in their old age, when they're too heavy and stupid for anything else, why let them. But for young people, who ought to be gathering new ideas, and meeting for the sake of exchanging them, to plant themselves at a table and spend an evening staring at their hands and saying, 'Pass! Pass!' Madam, it ought not to be once named among them." And the manner in which he thrust out his under lip and glared as he said it, was, as the lady afterwards declared, enough to make one's blood run cold.

But there were social diversions in plenty at Alma Lynn's party, games charmingly adapted to sharpening the wits of the players and bringing them into the most genial acquaintance. Dick Julian, who, as everybody knew, was on specially good terms with Alma, and was nothing if not a



genius in the way of making things lively, lent all his energies to the carrying out of her ideas; and as her guests came for the most part promptly, instead of straggling in during several hours, after the manner of a fashionable party, it was easy before long to have them all agreeably occupied.

A circle in the parlor were busy with a new game which one of the Boston girls had suggested, another in the library were engaged in a merry contest at word-making, and bursts of laughter from the hall testified to the hits which were being made at Crambo by a group of players there.

It was a particularly good crowd for the enjoyment of such things, but the grand success of the evening, as far as games were concerned, was a bout at "capping verses," in which Mr. Hermon himself took a part. He had come early, and for a while mingled with the company, shaking hands and chatting with the students in the most genial manner, but later he had gravitated to a corner of the library, and a volume of Homer, with "a date away back in the dark ages," as Dick Julian said, had presently absorbed him. It was Dick whose arts were finally successful in luring him away from the enticing volume to join in the sport.



“Capping verses? Why yes, that’s a good game; I used to enjoy playing it myself,” he said, in answer to the boy’s suggestion, and the benevolent desire of starting the young people off in good shape, which, as his tempter well knew, would speedily give place to a raging desire to beat them all, was sufficient to draw him into the circle.

As good luck would have it, Sue Orcutt was in that circle too, and Sue had a memory for verses, which, in its way, was not a bad match for Mr. Hermon’s own. His, as everybody knew, was simply phenomenal, and there was little indeed of the best literature which was not to him familiar ground. Lines from Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer, fell from his lips in swift succession, and if English poetry for an instant failed him, the treasures of Virgil, Horace, Dante, seemed equally at call. Sue, of course, had no such store from which to draw, but what she had she commanded with amazing readiness. There had been some good poetry in the old school readers; she had parsed from Pope’s *Essay on Man*; and as for Watts and *Select Hymns*, it really seemed as if she had the greater part of that venerable collection at her tongue’s end.



After ten minutes the contest was practically between these two. The rest of the company had one after another dropped out, their stock of available quotations quite exhausted, but there was no sign of flagging on the part of Sue or Mr. Hermon. They sat facing each other, the girl's cheeks as red as roses, and her eyes sparkling with excitement, while the great man of the Academy leaned forward, his hands clenched on the arms of his chair, and his face expressive of a distinct consciousness that for once he had met a "foeman worthy of his steel."

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed before there was a perceptible halt. It was Mr. Hermon's turn now, and for the first time he hesitated. The last quotation had ended with an e, that provokingly recurrent letter which had already taxed his memory at least a score of times. He ran his fingers through his hair, frowned, and puckered his lips into an inaudible whistle. Sue gave him a quarter of a minute, but she had no idea of letting him prolong his chance after that. The hymn book had already suggested to her the needed line.

"I have it!" she exclaimed, and starting to



her feet she repeated, in a tone of inexpressible triumph:

“Each cherub claps his wings of fire,  
Each seraph strikes his golden lyre.”

The effect was tremendous. Mr. Hermon threw himself back, and laughed in a manner which Sue remembered years after, when she read of the solitary explosion credited to the hero of Sartor Resartus. The company broke into applause, and Sue suddenly found herself the centre of the gayest congratulations. When the tumult had a little subsided, Mr. Hermon himself strode across the room and grasped her hand in a manner which made her fingers fairly tingle.

“Well, young lady,” he said, beaming down at her with the most evident enjoyment of it all, “this is the first time I was ever beaten at capping verses, and you may congratulate yourself on the feat all you wish to.”

“I’m afraid I gave that last quotation quicker than was really fair,” said Sue apologetically, “but I thought ’twas my only chance and I’d better take it.”

Mr. Hermon’s eyes twinkled. “Very discreet



on your part," he said, "but I think you'd have beaten me in the end without any doubt. Between Pope and the hymn book I foresee that you'd have gotten the better of me sooner or later. Perhaps, in a game of this kind it's really an advantage not to have too varied a store to draw from."

He chuckled to himself for a moment, then added, looking at her keenly, "I see you have a memory of the same sort I have. A line of poetry sticks to it as naturally as a burr in a sheep's wool, but you really ought to be filling it with the best things. Do you get to the library often?"

"Not as often as I wish I could," said Sue quickly; "but it's beautiful to be there even once in a while. I never had a chance at very many books till I came to Merton."

Mr. Hermon nodded as if he understood the case perfectly.

"Well, a few books are better than many for some people," he said; and then he added with emphasis, "that is, up to a certain point."

Sue wondered how it could be good for anybody to be shut up to a handful of books when



there was so much to be learned, and so many, many delightful books were waiting to disclose it. If people could only begin to read the moment they opened their eyes, and keep at it continuously for sixty or seventy years, *that*, it appeared to her, would be the really joyful thing. She was on the point of asking Mr. Hermon to explain that dark saying of his, when some one at his elbow, who was waiting for a chance to speak with him, took advantage of the pause to draw him off, and she felt that for the present at least her bit of chat was at an end.

She was feeling the disappointment, with a touch of vexation, when Dick Julian suddenly presented himself.

"I say, that was immense!" he exclaimed, his bright, handsome face quite aglow with admiration. "I didn't suppose there was anybody alive who could beat Mr. Hermon on quotations."

"Oh, I didn't really beat him," said Sue. "If I'd given him another second, he'd have had one."

"But he had no right to that other second," persisted Dick, "and you floored him in good shape. He enjoyed it too. Wasn't it great, though, the way he laughed?"



They both laughed at the remembrance, and then Sue said rather soberly that she didn't quite see what it was that amused him so much, after all.

"Why, it was your beating him, for one thing," said Dick promptly, "and then that line about the cherubs is so awfully funny. Where in the world did you get it?"

"Why, it's in the hymn book," said Sue. "It's in one of the hymns under 'Glories of Heaven.' Don't you remember? But I'm sure I never thought there was anything so very funny about it," she added, more soberly than before.

"Well, it strikes me as sort of comical," said Dick, twisting his face in the effort to keep it straight. "It makes it seem as if the cherubs were sort of roosters, you know, clapping their wings."

Sue looked distinctly shocked, and Dick's face reddened with a sudden misgiving that he had said something she did not approve.

"I'm afraid you think I'm awfully irreverent," he said, "but I don't mean to be. It isn't the cherubs that seem comical, but only that way of putting it. I don't feel a bit irreverent over



cherubs," he added earnestly, "when I look at that lovely pair in the picture of the Madonna."

Sue had not the slightest idea to what picture he referred, and she said so with a frankness which made Dick, in his turn, look a little shocked.

"Why, it's Raphael's picture, you know," he said politely, "the Sistine Madonna, where the clouds are all full of little angels, and the sweetest pair of all are at her feet."

Even after this Sue had the hardihood to admit that she knew nothing at all about it; and Dick, feeling himself surprisingly learned, offered a little modest information, to which he added, with a sudden recollection, "Why, there's a copy in the library here! Perhaps you'd like to go and look at it now."

She said most heartily that she would, and Dick escorted her at once to a corner of the library, where, among other exquisite engravings, hung the picture in question. It was the first fine Madonna Sue had ever seen, and unaccustomed as her eyes were to any contemplation of real art, she saw in an instant that it was unspeakably beautiful. She gazed at it for several minutes in



perfect silence, and Dick had the good taste not to break it by any comments of his.

"Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful!" she said at last, with a thrill in her voice. "I had no idea Madonnas looked like that." And then she could not help adding, with just a touch of severity in her expression, "But I think the cherubs are the best part of it. It's reasonable for cherubs to be in a position like that, but Mary was a real woman, and she couldn't have stood on the clouds that way. Somehow, it doesn't seem quite right."

Dick laughed irrepressibly. His ancestors had not, like hers, "come over in the Mayflower," and, if they had, possibly the atmosphere of wealth and culture which had for some time surrounded the Julian family would have dissipated any inherited prejudice against Madonnas in the clouds. He wished, with a twinkle in his eyes, that his sister could have heard that; then he said gayly:

"I guess you'd like the Madonna of the Chair better. You couldn't find any objection to that, unless it was the halo, but you have to put up with that in all of them, you know. I don't pretend to be any authority on Madonnas," he added modestly, "but I must say I think this is the pick



of the lot. Mamma insisted on my looking at no end of them when we were abroad, and I know she wanted me to feel awfully impressed, but this is the only one I can really remember. It's in the Dresden Gallery, and somehow it sticks by me a great deal better than the ones I saw in Rome. I guess it must be on account of the cherubs."

Sue turned her eyes suddenly from the picture, and looked at her companion with an expression of wonder greater even than she had bestowed upon the Madonna. "Do you mean to say that you've been in Rome?" she exclaimed, "*actually in Rome?* And have you seen the Seven Hills, and the Tiber, and the Tarpeian Rock, and the place where the Forum was, and —"

She stopped, fairly out of breath. The thought of it all was really too overwhelming.

Dick laughed again. It was the first time in his life that he had ever suspected any one of looking upon him as in the least degree remarkable, and the sensation was peculiar.

"Why, I guess I must have seen them," he said lightly; "but 'twas when I was just a little shaver, and I can't say I took much of it in. What I remember best is the fun I used



to have playing with the little Dagos in the court."

Sue gave a gasp. It was almost too much to realize that there actually were persons, fellow-countrymen of her own age, who had lived, and moved, and, for a time at least, had their being, among those historic scenes, of which she had read with such inexpressible swellings of heart, in the pages of her Ancient History. That they should have done anything, at any age, but gaze in awe-stricken admiration at those ancient wonders, was another stunning fact for which she felt herself wholly unprepared.

"Well," she said at last, looking at Dick with a strange expression, "I've often wondered how people felt who had actually seen Rome."

"So far as I know they don't feel any different from ordinary folks," said the boy, and he added instantly, "for they're ordinary folks themselves; in fact, the most ordinary kind."

Sue laughed a little now, and Dick felt that the acquaintance was progressing famously. He remembered that there was a portfolio in the room full of pictures of foreign scenes, and it occurred to him that Sue was just the person to



enjoy it. She certainly was, and the duty of showing it to her proved so extremely agreeable that for the next hour neither of them felt the least inclination to look for entertainment anywhere else. In the midst of it the announcement came of refreshments in the dining-room, and it went without saying that they should go out together and finish their tête-à-tête there.

It was a beautiful room, of course, but Sue was more impressed by the flowers on the table than by anything else. She had never seen so many in mid-winter, in all her life together, and the bunch of red carnations which were presently given to her, for her own, quite overpowered her with the sense of riches.

Bertha was already in the room. She had come out with a tall young senior who had the reputation of being one of the best scholars at the Academy, but they did not seem to have half as much to say to each other as Sue and Dick.

“Do you know,” said the latter, who evidently thought it quite time to get down from high art to every-day life, “I began to think I should never see you anywhere outside of the class-room. Seems to me you don’t go out as much as the other girls.”



“Well, I don’t go out much, except to the library,” admitted Sue. “You see we don’t have much time, and I have to study pretty hard.”

“Not as hard as you did on that first lesson, I hope,” said Dick with a twinkle in his eyes.

Sue’s cheeks, which were red before, grew a shade redder. How did he know how much time she spent on that first lesson? She asked the question with her eyes, and he read it in an instant.

“Why, we all knew about that,” he replied boldly. “You don’t suppose Mr. Hermon could keep it to himself, do you? He told the whole story in the Greek class the next Monday morning. My, but he set you on a pinnacle, and if he didn’t make the rest of us feel like poor, miserable sinners, ’twasn’t his fault, I can tell you.”

Sue looked uncomfortable. “I wish he hadn’t done it,” she said. “I worked that way because I had to. That was all there was about it.”

“Well, I think ’twas only fair that he should tell,” protested Dick. “He knew what we all thought.” He colored a little at the glance Sue gave him, then added stoutly, “Why, we



couldn't help it, you see, you reeled it off so fast. Though, of course, if we'd ever heard you recite before, we should have known that was the way you naturally did it. You really mustn't be too hard on us for *that*, considering 'twas the first lesson."

"Well, I should think you'd all have risen up, then and there, and asked him to put me out of the class, if *that* was what you thought," said Sue, her eyes full of righteous indignation.

Dick looked a trifle uneasy. The subject of "ponies" was perhaps one on which he did not care to be drawn out very fully.

"What I should like to know," he said, turning rather hastily to another branch of the subject, "is whether it's really true that you never had read anything but the Latin Reader when you came into our class."

"Yes, that's the fact of the matter," said Sue; "but I didn't mean any one should find it out." And then her eyes suddenly sparkled. "Do you know," she exclaimed, "that I never should have gotten into your class at all if it hadn't been for you?"

"For *me*?" repeated Dick in amazement.



"Yes," she said, with a little nod, and then she told him of that first interview with Mr. Hermon, and how she had been saved the disclosure of her secret, by his sudden coming into the room.

Dick seemed much impressed. "Well, that's one for me!" he exclaimed in a tone of high satisfaction when she had finished. "I'll bring that up to Mr. Hermon the next time he tells me I haven't accomplished anything since I've been in Merton Academy."

"Does he ever tell you that?" asked Sue, looking at him with sudden solemnity.

"Well, he throws out a hint of that sort, now and then," said Dick. "You must have discovered by this time that our respected principal has a powerful imagination."

She did not respond to the smile with which he said it. "I should think it would be dreadful to feel that he was displeased with you," she said very gravely. "It seems to me I couldn't bear it."

"Well, it is pretty bad," said Dick, sobering at once. "I hate to have him feel that way myself. But the bother is he's set the standard for me so unconscionably high. You see he knew my father at college, and father made a tremendous record



in everything he took. That's what Mr. Hermon is always measuring me by. He can't get it out of his head that I ought to do that same way, and carry off all the honors just as father did. Hang it all, 'tisn't in me! I don't care a bit about the honors nor college either."

"*Oh!*" said Sue, and it is doubtful whether from his father, or the principal of Merton Academy, Dick Julian had ever received a look of such sorrowful amazement as the little girl in the white dress gave him at that moment. The passionate longing she had felt all her life for a thorough education, the ambition to excel, with which every fibre of her nature tingled, the love of knowledge for its own sake, all rushed upon her at that instant, and she wondered with an inexpressible wonder at the case of this boy, who, with the way made smooth before him, cared for none of these things. The one little monosyllable was all she uttered, and perhaps it was the best she could have done.

Dick's face grew still more sober. "I know you think that's strange," he said humbly. "Sometimes I do feel ashamed of myself, and think I'll try to turn over a new leaf."



“Oh, I would,” said Sue, with the most unaffected earnestness. “I’m sure you could do splendidly if you tried, and ’twould do Mr. Hermon so much good.”

“Well, I honestly believe I will, just for the novelty of the thing,” said Dick. His cheerfulness had recovered itself at a bound, and he added lightly, “It *would* please Mr. Hermon, there’s no mistake about that. He thinks a good deal of me, for all I’ve been such a thorn in his side, and I think a good deal of him too. I boarded at his house the first term I was here, but we couldn’t stand that, either of us. However, I feel at home there yet, and I make it a matter of conscience to look in upon him at least once a week.”

“He asked me once to come and see him,” said Sue eagerly. “It was that night I told him about the Cicero, and I’ve been longing to go ever since. But he didn’t set the time, and somehow I haven’t had the courage.”

Dick looked amused. “You needn’t be a bit afraid of him,” he said. “He’s the coziest kind of a man in his own study,” and then he added, with a little laugh, “The idea of *your* being afraid, such a scholar as you are, and *my* running in whenever I’ve a mind to! It’s a clear case of fools rushing in where angels fear to tread.”



She looked a little annoyed, and he made haste to add, "You see I do know a quotation or two, though I can't shoot them off as you can, when it comes to capping verses."

The cake and ice-cream had been finished by this time, and it occurred to Sue that it was quite time to join her sister. Dick, however, detained her for just a moment longer, while he suggested, in a low voice, the pleasure it would give him if he might accompany her home at the close of the evening.

"Oh, thank you," she said, looking at him with the most artless candor, "but there isn't a bit of need of it. Bertha and I always go together, and we're not at all afraid."

Dick bit his lip. He told Alma Lynn afterwards that Sue Orcutt was the coolest hand at giving a fellow the mitten he had ever seen; but it was evident that he did not feel much cut up by it, and apparently he liked her none the less. As for Sue, she felt rather sorry she had refused him, when a half-hour later she found herself obliged to share with her sister the attentions of the dignified young senior, whose escort, much to her amazement, Bertha had accepted.



Eleven o'clock came wonderfully early that night, and had not the limits of invitation been definitely fixed in advance, it is more than likely that many of Alma's guests would have prolonged their stay. That the evening was the shortest they had ever known, was a remark made by more than one of the gay young company as they left the door, and that it had been thoroughly enjoyed was testimony to which there was not a solitary exception. Not all of them said it in set phrase to the hostess, but they said it to themselves and each other with possibly the more heartiness, as they walked briskly homeward under the frosty winter's starlight.

The little dressmaker, who of course came into the girls' room the next evening to hear all about it, received full particulars; and she remarked at the end in a tone of complete satisfaction, "Well, I knew 'twould be worth going to, and I'm so glad you went."

To which Bertha responded heartily, "I had no idea a party could be so nice," and Sue added with a loving little squeeze of Miss Graham's hand, "And I know it was a great deal nicer for *me* because I had that beautiful dress."



## CHAPTER XVI.

### DICK MAKES A CALL.

AFTER that it came about naturally enough that, in a social way, the girls saw more of their schoolmates. The dignified young senior came home with them both from the next Saturday evening meeting; and though Sue would much rather have had Bertha's company all to herself, and had a strong suspicion that the young man shared her sentiments, they mutually made the best of it, and talked earnestly, as they walked along, of the points Mr. Hermon had made in his talk.

Ah, those talks! Which of all the boys and girls, grown now to middle-aged men and women, who were fortunate enough to sit in that old class-room when Theophilus Hermon sat on the platform can ever forget them?

He was always simple, often homely in his phrase and illustration, but he held those fresh young hearts as only a great and gifted soul



could hold them, and there were moments when he set the best and highest aims of life before them in a glory which must haunt the memory through all after years, a vision to "poison all meaner choice forever more."

There was just one drawback, in the minds of some of the sedate patrons of the school, to those glorious meetings. That was a fashion the boys had of ranging themselves in two straight lines outside the door, and as the girls walked demurely through, capturing one after another for the walk home. Somehow, these valiant escorts always managed to get out of the room first and stand there in solemn readiness; and though it was sometimes whispered among the girls that it was really a dreadful ordeal, the historian fails to recall the name of any who ever stayed away on that account.

Dick Julian invariably walked off with Alma Lynn. They had long been on terms of the most perfect *camaraderie*, but discerning classmates of his were beginning to suspect of late that he was not quite indifferent to the little girl in the Cicero class. It was noticed that he glanced furtively at her when he made a good recitation, and as a



matter of fact, Dick made a rather surprising number of these in the week that followed the party. Not that they were phenomenal in any way. The constructions were still a little shaky, and the choice of words not quite Websterian, but they did imply a fair amount, at least, of honest study, and once called forth from Mr. Hermon a benignant, "Dick, my boy, I have hopes of you." It was on this occasion that Sue sent him an unmistakable smile, and the boy's face had flushed with pleasure to the edge of his curly brown hair.

Perhaps it was this smile that inspired him suddenly with a bold desire to call upon her. In general, Dick had nerve enough for gallantries of any sort, but in Sue's case there were obstacles. He had a half suspicion that if he did call, she would not have the least idea what he had come for, and would stand at the door with a wondering look waiting for him to deliver his errand. But Fortune favored Dick. It was a way Fortune had, for that matter. Never was a boy to whose wishes circumstances seemed to shape themselves with more easy accommodation or who slid out of scrapes and embarrassments with greater facility.



A few evenings later he stood at the door of the room over Mrs. Porter's kitchen and made his best bow as Sue responded to his knock.

She had quite the surprised look he had expected, and he made haste to say, "I hope I'm not intruding. I have a little errand to Miss Graham, and Mrs. Porter told me she was up here. She said she'd call her down," he added ingeniously, "but I knew the way up and thought I'd save her the trouble."

"Won't you come in?" said Sue, and he accepted her invitation with the utmost alacrity.

"I should think you did know the way up here, Dick," said Miss Graham, when he had delivered himself of the message from his landlady to the effect that she wanted a day's work from the little dressmaker, and the latter had fixed the date. "You certainly ought to know it. It seems to me you were here most of the time that term we had Griggs and Riley."

"I'm afraid I was," said Dick, smiling, "and I shouldn't wonder if we bothered you sometimes with our racket. It was an awfully jolly place to come. But I don't believe either of the boys would know their old quarters if they should step



in here now," he added, glancing with a smile about the neat, cozy room.

"It would need a pile of dirty dishes on the table, and a sprinkling of ashes and grease-spots round the stove, and a bootjack or so in the middle of the floor, to make the place look really familiar," assented Miss Graham. "Not that I came in here much to visit in those days," she added, with a glance at the girls; "but they had a way of keeping the door open, and a body can't go down stairs with her eyes shut, you know. By the way, I wonder what's become of those boys."

"Griggs is teaching in Thornbridge this winter," said Dick, "but he was over at Alma Lynn's party the other night." He turned suddenly towards the girls and demanded gayly, "Didn't we have the best kind of a time, though, at that party?"

"Yes indeed," they responded in chorus, and Sue added to Bertha's warm little eulogy of Alma, "But I thought the very best of it all was having Mr. Hermon there."

"Well, that was good," said Dick cordially, "and I guess he enjoyed it himself. As a rule, he hates going to parties."



"I wonder why," said Sue; "it doesn't seem to be a bit of trouble to him to talk with people."

"I guess it's partly because he hates the bother of dressing up," laughed Dick. "He doesn't give much time to his personal appearance as a general thing, you know."

"Well, I wish he did give a little more time to it before he comes to school some days," said Bertha rather severely.

"I don't know as I do," said Sue, bridleing. She had quite forgotten the sensation of that first moment when she herself stood before his desk and noted, in a dismayed surprise, the disordered hair, the twisted cravat, and the missing cuff. "His peculiarities are just a part of himself, and I don't want him the least bit different from what he is. He is too great to care about the way he looks."

"Oh my dear, nobody's great enough to be above being neat," interposed Miss Graham. "A person's dress counts for a good deal in this world."

"Mr. Hermon would agree with you there," said Dick quickly. "I've heard him grow positively eloquent over the matter of being orderly,



and he's meek as a lamb if anybody takes him to task for his own careless appearance; but the trouble is he gets to thinking about something else, and then he actually doesn't know what he puts on or how he puts it. I've known him to go to school with one shoe on and one slipper."

Bertha looked rather disgusted, and Sue inwardly wished that she could have it for part of her mission in life to dust Mr. Hermon's shoes every morning, and set them where he could not possibly fail to stick his feet into them.

"But the funniest thing of all," continued Dick, with a laugh in his voice, "was the way he started once to comb his hair. He usually forgets it, you know, or, if he doesn't, runs his fingers through it the very next minute and makes it look worse than ever. Well, it was last year at Commencement, and Mrs. Riggs—she's his housekeeper—had set her heart on his looking particularly nice. She stood over him herself till the collar and neck-tie were safely on, but, as ill-luck would have it, she was called off just then, and had to leave him to comb his hair himself. He really meant to do the job in first-class style, and he wet his hair uncommonly wet and combed it down over his



forehead to get the part straight. But just at that moment he caught sight of Dr. Jeffrey, who had come to make the address that day, going by the house, and he forgot what he was doing, clapped his hat onto his head, and rushed after him. You just ought to have seen how he looked sitting on the platform! The oldest inhabitant never saw his hair plastered down in that way before, and 'twas too comical for anything. Mrs. Riggs actually cried over it, and she told me afterwards she'd never ask him to comb his hair again the longest day she lived."

Dick fairly doubled up with the remembrance, and the others, including Bertha, laughed convulsively.

"Well, Mr. Hermon's an odd genius," said Miss Graham, when the laugh had subsided. "There's no use trying to defend some of his tricks and manners, but people who can't excuse any or all of them after they once know him, aren't worth considering. I suppose he keeps you as hard at work as ever, Dick," she added, with a sly glance at the boy.

"Harder," said Dick solemnly. "I've been working like a Turk for the last ten days. My



landlady's beginning to feel positively worried about me."

Miss Graham looked amused, and Dick added, with a glance at Sue, "You'll vouch for me in the Cicero, won't you?"

"I'll vouch for it that you've been making the best recitations you've had this term," said Sue heartily, "and I know it has pleased Mr. Hermon. Somehow I think it hurts him worse when you fail than when any of the rest of us do."

"I know it," said Dick with a groan, "and it puts a terrible strain on a soft-hearted fellow like me; but I've been trying my level best lately. I have, indeed."

"Well, your lessons show it," said Sue warmly. She was beginning to feel a real liking for Dick Julian now that he was trying so hard to please Mr. Hermon, and she added, with a glow in her eyes, "That was a first-rate translation you had Monday."

"Well, it ought to be," said Dick, with obvious gratification. "I stayed home from church Sunday, and worked on it all the morning."

The glow in Sue's eyes changed to a stare of blank amazement. The look she had given him



that night at the party when he intimated his indifference to a college education was nothing to this.

“On *Sunday*?” she repeated incredulously. “You don’t mean to say you studied it on Sunday?”

“Why yes, I did,” said Dick, beginning to redden. “I hope you don’t think there is anything so very dreadful in that.”

Sue did not speak for a moment. Then she said slowly, “I think I’d rather fail completely in a lesson of *mine* than learn it Sunday.”

“*You’d* rather fail?” repeated Dick. “Well, that is putting it strong. But come now,” he went on, squaring himself in his chair, and beginning to look rather combative, “I’d like to know what harm there is anyway in getting a lesson on Sunday. I don’t mean every Sunday. I wouldn’t go in for it as a steady thing, but now and then, you know, when you’re in a tight place.”

“If it’s ever right, I don’t see why it isn’t always right,” said Sue. “It’s the principle of the thing. Sunday wasn’t meant for work. It was meant for rest.”

“Oh, but works of necessity and mercy,” cried



Dick. "Everybody makes allowance for them, and my studying last Sunday was both — necessity for me and mercy for Mr. Hermon. You know yourself how he feels when I fail."

Sue frowned a little. The subject struck her as quite too serious for jesting. "You'll have to prove it was a necessity first," she said, "and as for its being a kindness to Mr. Hermon, don't you think he'd feel troubled if he knew when you learned it?"

The last question was a home thrust. Dick dropped his head for a minute. "Well, he *is* rather strict in his views about Sunday," he admitted; "I shouldn't exactly like to tell him. But as to the necessity, honor bright, I had to do it. It was that or failure, and of the two evils, I thought studying was the least. I tell you, you can't always keep that commandment about resting on Sunday."

"It's pretty hard to keep *half* of any commandment," observed Miss Graham. "You'd better make up your mind to keep the whole of it, or not pretend to be keeping it at all."

Even Sue looked a little puzzled, and Miss Graham went on. "Did it ever occur to you that



one very important part of that commandment, and the part on which all that follows is based, is '*Six days shalt thou labor?*' God didn't tell people to rest till after he had distinctly told them to work, and a person who hasn't done a good honest week's work isn't entitled to a rest-day, anyhow. If he *has* done it, he's done enough, and is not only entitled, but in duty bound—in duty to himself, I say—to rest a bit and get a fresh start."

The bright little spot which sometimes came in Miss Graham's cheeks when she was very much in earnest had come now. The young people were all silent. Somehow, even the Orcutt girls had never thought of it in just this way before.

"I'm not a preacher," she went on, "but I'm a working woman, and perhaps I've earned the right to say a word about Sunday. I know what a rest-day is worth to tired folks, and I want to do all I can to keep it safe for them. Besides, I'm almost old enough to be your mother, and I do hate to see young folks getting off the track and making mistakes on a simple thing like this. Let's be real honest now about this thing we call necessity. Dick, did you really take the time you



might for your studying on Saturday, or did you go off coasting and let the work go by till Sunday?"

"I guess you've hit it about right," said Dick soberly.

"Well, then, you broke the first part of the commandment, and that's just what got you into trouble with the last part. Of course I know there is work that comes of necessity on Sunday, but necessity's a stiff old word and not half elastic enough to cover all the things we try to shove under it—the things, for instance, that might just as well be done before Sunday comes."

"But don't you think it makes Sunday an awfully rigid sort of day if you can't work a little, even when you want to?" said Dick. "And I suppose you think it's just as bad to play as to work on Sunday. It does seem to me as if a body ought to have a little choice. 'The Sabbath was made for man,' you know," he added impressively.

Miss Graham's eyes twinkled for a moment. "My dear young friend," she said, "I give you my word for it that if you work as hard as you ought to six days in the week, you won't have



any raging desire to work on Sunday, and as for that poor, abused little text, well, a body might ask what a man *is*, anyway. If he's only a machine made for grinding out work, why, let him keep at it if he wants to. Even a machine will wear out too soon if you run it all the time without stopping, but if it's only a machine, why, no matter.

"And then again," her eyes lost the twinkle and grew very serious, "if a man is only a sort of animal whose chief end in life is to eat and drink and be as merry as he can, why, let him rollic as he likes on Sunday. But if he really is something grander than that, if God meant him to be when He made him in His own image, then the question is worth considering what sort of a use of Sunday will help him most."

She paused, and Dick turned upon her with a sudden question. "Miss Graham, do you think it always helps people to go to church? I don't think it helps me a bit when old Mr. Tookey preaches. He never says one interesting thing, and I'm sure it would do me a sight more good to get off into the woods."

Miss Graham shook her head. "Now I'm not



going to try to tell you or anybody else just what you ought to do on Sunday. It's quite enough to get it settled for myself. But I will say this, that the very best folks I've known — and I've known a sight of folks — were those that had a steady habit of going to church, and didn't let anything but real honest necessity keep them away. We don't go there to worship the minister, — thank the Lord for that, — and most of us are made so that it really does help us to be in the place where other people with needs like our own have met on Sunday, and the thought of God and the prayer for his help go out in definite words.

“I remember when I was a child and was made to go to church by my father and mother, I thought sometimes that when I was old enough to do as I pleased, I'd stay away. But, bless your hearts, when it came to that, I had gotten into such a habit of going that I couldn't stop, — at least, not and feel comfortable about it, — and I'm glad I couldn't. It's been a help to me all my life.”

She broke off with a smile. “Well, I've been giving you a regular sermon. You can take it,



Dick, in place of the one you lost last Sunday. I don't feel a bit sorry for you, but it's a double dose for the girls, and I'll stop right now. You might take this, though, for a finish. It's an old-fashioned rhyme that I learned when I was a girl.

“‘A Sabbath well spent  
Brings a week of content  
And strength for the toils of the morrow;  
But a Sabbath profaned,  
Whatsoever be gained,  
Is a certain forerunner of sorrow.’”

Dick rose with a little bow. “I shan't forget it, nor the sermon either,” he said quite seriously.

“You'd better stay and have some apples and chestnuts,” said Bertha. “The chestnuts are roasting in the oven, and I think they're just done.”

The delicious odor which came from the oven as she opened the door quite settled the matter, and Dick finished his call with a little treat, which he warmly pronounced of a “way up sort.” On the whole, the half-hour passed so pleasantly that in spite of the disgrace into which he was afraid he had fallen with his little classmate, he



could not help hoping she would ask him to come again. She did not do it, however, and Dick reflected rather ruefully, as he walked away, that he would have to "scrape up another errand" if he came a second time.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### SUE RECEIVES AN UNEXPECTED APPOINTMENT.

IT was a few days after this that an event occurred, slight in itself, but so important in its bearing on Sue Orcutt's fortunes, that the faithful historian could in nowise be excused, if it failed to go down in full in the annals of this winter at Merton Academy. Ever since that night at Alma Lynn's party, the girl had brooded with an intense longing over the thought of a visit to Mr. Hermon. A few evenings later, she had, indeed, made the attempt to see him; but, as ill-luck would have it, he was not at home, and the old timidity somehow crept back upon her as the distance widened between her and that genial occasion. She began to feel, however, that the time was growing short, and to fear that some untoward fate might actually prevent her having the pleasure at all, unless she secured it soon.



It was one morning, just at the close of the Cicero class, that the longing shaped itself suddenly into a definite resolution.

Her own recitation, which was the last of the hour, had been unusually fine, and the look with which Mr. Hermon rewarded her, had given the thought of spending an hour in his society a charm even beyond the ordinary. "I believe I'll stop right now, and ask him if he's going to be at home this evening," she said to herself, "and if he is, I'll ask if I may come to see him. That would be the straightforward way, and I don't believe I could stand it to go there again and not find him at home."

She lingered a little for her classmates to pass from the room, and her eyes were bright with expectation, as she stepped towards the desk. Before she had quite reached it, however, a child of about seven years, a pretty little fellow, stepped briskly in with a note, which he was evidently in haste to deliver to Mr. Hermon.

The boys of the class nodded at him with an air of easy acquaintance, and Sue herself remembered that it was not the first time she had seen him. There were, in fact, a score or more of



attractive-looking children, with whose appearance the Academy students usually became quite familiar. They had a school of their own, in a room at the rear of the Academy, which had been used by the students themselves in the palmy days of that institution, but which, in its present decline as to numbers, could be spared with melancholy ease. It was a school of its own sort, not a kindergarten (that system was as yet but little known in rural villages), and not a primary school either of quite the ordinary sort. It was a private affair, supported by a dozen or more well-to-do families, who preferred for their children shorter hours and a somewhat more elastic system than the graded schools of the town permitted; and Mr. Hermon had been persuaded, after much demurring, to take it under his fatherly jurisdiction, partly because of the importunity of its patrons, and partly because he could never be really indifferent to anything which was going on under the Academy roof. He was rather fond of the children, though if he could have turned them out of their usurped corner, and supplied their places with a room full of Academy students, he would



have done it in an instant, and without a twinge of compunction. In fact, he looked upon the little school, from term to term, as a merely temporary thing,—an opinion of his, which, though its patrons did not in the least share, they wisely allowed to remain undisputed.

It was one of these juvenile occupants of the Academy, who, while Sue waited for a chance to speak with Mr. Hermon, stepped suddenly up before her.

“Ha, Teddy!” said Mr. Hermon, with a smile at the rosy young face. And then he frowned suddenly, as his eyes fell on the note, the contents of which he apparently anticipated.

“Hm,” he grunted, when he had glanced it hastily through. “So your teacher’s sick again, and wants to know if she may dismiss you. I don’t like this business. I don’t like it at all.”

The child had evidently seen the great man frown before, for he did not flinch. He stood in his place, looking quietly expectant.

“You like it, I suppose,” said Mr. Hermon; “you little fellows would be glad to play all the time; but it won’t do, my lad; no, it won’t do. If you fall into such idle ways now, you won’t



know how to study when you get in here. Perhaps you won't get in here at all," he added grimly.

The child really looked a little troubled, and Dick Julian, who was passing at the moment, whispered, giving him a friendly tweak, "Tell you what, Teddy, you don't want to miss that! It's awful good fun studying Greek and Latin."

"No," pursued Mr. Hermon, his frown deepening, "I don't like this business. You've had two holidays already in the last two weeks, and we must put a stop to it."

For a minute he seemed to be considering in some perplexity what he had better do, then suddenly his eyes fell on Sue Orcutt, and his face brightened with the gleam of a new idea.

"Miss Orcutt," he exclaimed, bending towards her with one of his quick, sharp glances, "why can't you go in and take Miss Dearborn's place this morning? They have only a half-day session, and you would lose no recitation but the chemistry. I presume you have prepared that lesson already."

Sue opened her eyes in astonishment. "I never taught school in my life," she said, thinking he must be under some misapprehension.



“That makes no difference,” he said half impatiently. “You’ll get along all right,” and he gave her one of his short, emphatic nods, which always seemed to imply that there was absolutely nothing to be said on the other side of the question; after which, however, he had the grace to add, “I should consider it a personal favor if you would go.”

That settled it, whether his opinion of her ability did or not. “I’ll try my best, sir,” she said earnestly. She waited a moment longer, half hoping he would accompany her and introduce her to the greatness thus suddenly thrust upon her, but apparently he did not consider it in the least necessary. The child, however, who had been looking at her intently, slipped his hand into hers, and they walked off together.

The way to the children’s room was around the outside of the building, the door which connected it with the rest of the interior being in these days kept scrupulously locked. It had been originally only a class-room, but had been of late years enlarged and fitted up by the patrons of the school in a way to give it a most attractive appearance. The children, fourteen in number



(as Sue afterward counted them), looked up from their books, as she entered behind her little guide, and regarded her with evident surprise. A young lady on the platform, who looked ill and really unfit to be there, apparently shared their feeling. Sue did not wait for her to speak first.

“Mr. Hermon asked me to come and take your place this morning,” she said, stepping quickly towards her. “He thought that would be better than to give up the school entirely.”

The young lady bowed, but looked as if she felt slightly annoyed. “I’m sure I’m much obliged,” she murmured; then turning to her pupils, she said, “I hope you’ll all be very good, and not give your new teacher any trouble.”

The severity of the headache from which she was suffering was doubtless responsible for her forgetting to give the young substitute any directions for the morning’s work, and Sue herself was too much embarrassed to remember that she needed any. She felt more at ease when, after wishing her a polite good morning, the teacher in ordinary passed out and she was left alone with her charge. The children looked amiable, but a touch of disap-



pointment was visible on all their faces, and Sue's quick eyes noted it at once.

"Children," she said in her impulsive way, "I don't believe you like my coming at all, and I can't say I blame you. I'm sure if Mr. Hermon were ill some morning, and we had to take somebody else in his place, I shouldn't like it one bit. But he knows what is best,—he always does, of course,—and he sent me to do what I could to help you this forenoon. It really *is* better to study awhile and play afterwards, you know, for it makes playing seem so much nicer. I think we shall get along all right, and have a good time together, but of course you'll have to tell me how you do things, because I don't know anything about it."

It is doubtful whether Mr. Hermon could have introduced her in a manner which would have been half as effective. The children's faces brightened in an instant, and they turned to their books, with the obvious intention of doing their best to make her effort a success.

She had made one mistake, however, as she presently found to her grief. In intimating a desire for advice on the part of the children, she



had inspired each and every one with a feeling of responsibility for offering it at once and in surprisingly large quantities. The eagerness with which they proceeded to tell her how things were done, and the conflict of opinion which arose over every detail, would have involved her little kingdom in utter confusion if she had not speedily come to her own relief and decided to act according to her individual judgment. After this things moved beautifully.

One after another the classes were called and the recitations heard, but the filling in of the time was what troubled Sue most. It seemed to her she had never known such ridiculously short lessons, and the number of pupils in each class was so small, that when the knowledge of each had been tested over and over, the unused moments still hung heavily on her hands. She had an instinctive notion that the way to keep children quiet and happy in school-time was to keep them busy, a corner-stone of doctrine, by the way, on which some older educators would do well to build; but the difficulty of knowing what these new acquaintances of hers could do, or how, in her ignorance, to set them at it, was decidedly puzzling.



It still lacked half an hour of noon when the last lesson was called, but fortunately it was a reading lesson, and this at least afforded some chance for expansion. Fortunately, too, the lesson was that familiar story, beloved of children, which records the adventure of Silverhair and the Bears, and it would have been a duller girl than Sue Orcutt who could have found nothing to say to those bright-faced boys and girls in connection with a story like that. A little adroit questioning brought out a deal of eager knowledge on their part concerning bears, and it was probably the friendliness of feeling excited by recollections of zoölogical gardens and mild-eyed bruins, who had climbed trees or sat at the door of picturesque little dens and fed on peanuts, which made Teddy Ranger (the child who had acted as Sue's escort) burst out suddenly with a startling question.

"I d-don't think it was quite f-fair for Silverhair to eat up the little bear's supper and break d-down his chair, do you?" he exclaimed, leaning forward with stuttering eagerness.

Sue's face flashed with an instant delight. It had occurred to her before that the bright-haired little meddler of the story had really behaved in



a quite unscrupulous manner, and the child's question acted as a sudden spark to an imagination which was always easily kindled.

"Well, I do think 'twas pretty hard on the little bear, Teddy," she said, "and I shouldn't wonder a bit if he got even with her afterwards. In fact" — she dropped her head for a minute with the look of a person who is thinking intently — "I believe there's another part to this story, only it isn't in the book."

"Do you know it? Do you know it?" exclaimed half-a-dozen voices in concert.

"I believe I do know a little of it," she said, reflecting.

By this time every child in the room was on the alert, and several had crowded round her chair, which she had set down from the platform, feeling that it raised her quite too high above the common level.

"You must give me a minute to think," she said, as she had said a hundred times to the little girls at home when they called on her for a story. And presently, with no more constraint than she would have felt if she had really been in that familiar circle, she began.



“You see the little bear felt very unhappy that night. He had no supper, for, as you know, Silverhair had eaten his all up. Of course the great bear and the middle-sized bear offered him some of their porridge, but he didn’t like it any better than Silverhair did, so he had to make out as best he could with a crust of bread. Then, too, he had nothing to sit down on, for Silverhair had broken the bottom out of his chair. So he had to stand on his hind legs all the time he was eating, and that of course wasn’t very pleasant.

“All at once he broke out with a queer little growl, ‘I say, let’s watch our chance to get into Silverhair’s house when she’s away, and let’s eat up her supper and break down her chair, and see how *she’ll* like it.’ ”

The children’s eyes grew so large at this astounding proposal that the story-teller felt it necessary to pause and throw in a little apology for the irate young bruin.

“Of course,” she said, “you and I know that we always ought to return good for evil, but bears don’t go to Sunday school, and that makes the difference. They never heard the golden rule in their lives, and the only song they know is



that good old hymn that says, 'Let bears and lions growl and fight, For 'tis their nature to.'

"So of course the little bear thought revenge was all right, and the others did too. The great bear patted him on the head with his huge brown paw and said, 'This is a bright cub of ours.' And the middle-sized bear added, 'He'll be a great bear some day. See if he isn't!'

"Then they put their heads together and decided that the very next morning they would hunt for Silverhair's house, and get in, if they could, and pay her back for all the mischief she had done.

"They did not forget, you may be sure of that. The little bear dreamed about it all night, sleeping in the bed where she had taken her nap, and as soon as they had eaten their breakfast the next morning off they went. But they had to be very careful in going, for there was a prejudice against bears in that part of the country, and they had to skulk in the bushes and keep out of sight as much as possible.

"It was afternoon before they found the house, a little brown cottage in the edge of the woods; but they knew it was the right one, for there was Silverhair herself climbing a tree to peep into a



woodpecker nest. The door was open, and they could have rushed in as well as not, but they saw Silverhair's mother sitting by the window, and they were afraid they might disturb her; so they crept back into the bushes and waited in hopes that she would go away.

"And sure enough, just as the sun was going down, and the bears were getting most dreadfully hungry, Silverhair's mother came out of the house with her bonnet on.

"‘Come, Silverhair,’ she said; ‘it’s almost time for supper. Let us go and call your father home.’

"Then she shut the door behind her, and the two walked off together, but they never thought to put the windows down, and one of them was left wide open.

"‘Now’s our chance!’ cried the three bears, and they scrambled out of the bushes and ran to the house as fast as ever they could.

"‘I’m half starved,’ cried the great bear, as he climbed in at the window. ‘Hope they’ve got something nice for supper. A good fat sheep or a fine large deer would suit me.’

"‘Or a couple of tender young calves,’ said the



middle-sized bear. 'We won't leave a bone for Silverhair.'

"'Here's the supper all ready now,' cried the little bear, and he pushed a door open into a room where there was a table set for three. It was not at all the kind of a supper they had wanted, and the faces of the old bears fell; but there was a dish of custard on the table that looked a little like porridge, and they thought they could eat that at least. The great bear and the middle-sized bear stuck their noses in together, but they pulled them out again the next minute.

"'It's too sweet,' said the great bear with a discontented grunt.

"'It's too sour,' said the middle-sized bear with another grunt.

"'It's just right!' cried the little bear, and he drank it all up in a minute.

"Then they noticed a plate of buns, and decided to try how those would taste; but the great bear threw his on the floor after taking a single bite.

"'They're worse seasoned than the porridge,' he growled, and the middle-sized bear added, 'They're not properly baked either. The crust doesn't go half-way through.'



“ ‘They’re just right!’ said the little bear again, and he ate every one without stopping.

“ ‘Let us get out of this place,’ growled the two old bears; ‘there’s nothing we want here.’

“ ‘We must find Silverhair’s chair first,’ said the little bear, and he led the way into another room, which was the strangest place they had ever seen. The floor felt like moss under their feet, and there were chairs of all sorts, — straight chairs and rocking-chairs, stuffed chairs and willow chairs.

“ ‘The great bear sat down in the biggest chair of all, but he jumped up again with a very wry face. ‘That’s a dreadful chair,’ he growled. ‘It makes me sick to go swinging back and forth like that.’

“ ‘The middle-sized bear had sat down in a stuffed sleepy-hollow, but she too jumped up again in a hurry. ‘Dear me!’ she howled, ‘I thought I was going clear through.’

“ ‘The little bear had climbed into a beautiful red high-chair, and it suited him exactly. ‘It’s the best chair of all,’ he said, leaning back. ‘I guess I’ll take it to pay for the one Silverhair broke.’

“ ‘At that very instant what should they hear but a sound of steps coming into the house, and in another moment there was a clamor of voices from



the room where the table was set. 'Somebody's been and eaten up our supper!' they all cried together.

"Then a great voice roared, 'Thieves! thieves!' and a middle-sized voice screamed, 'Tramps! tramps!' and a wee, small voice cried, '*The bears! the bears!*' The last was the voice of Silverhair herself, and there she stood in the door-way, looking right straight at them.

"The bears did not wait to hear any more, but jumped out of the window and made off as fast as they could. The little bear was last, climbing out with Silverhair's chair in his arms, when he heard the great voice say something about a gun, and he dropped the chair and got down on all fours. As it dropped, he was sure he heard something break, but he had no time to stop and examine it. He ran for dear life, and none of the three slackened their pace till they were all safe in the den, with the door fast bolted behind them."

The children drew a long breath. Teddy Ranger found his voice first. "Well," he said, "I guess the bears didn't go back to that house again very soon!"

"And I guess Silverhair didn't want to go to



their house either!" said a sweet little girl, who was leaning on Sue's lap.

"No," laughed the story-teller. "I guess they all concluded to stay in their own places and not meddle with other people's things."

She heard a sort of chuckle behind her at that moment, and turning suddenly saw Mr. Theophilus Hermon. He had entered quietly by the inner door, the key of which he carried in his own pocket, and in the absorption of the story neither she nor her audience had seen him. She started from her chair now, her face the color of a full-blown peony.

"Oh, Mr. Hermon," she said, in a flutter of embarrassment, "the children had recited all their lessons, and I really didn't know what to do to use up the time."

"You seem to have found a very satisfactory way," he said, his eyes twinkling with the utmost good humor; "I must say I rather enjoyed that story myself. Where did you get it?"

Sue's color grew, if possible, a shade deeper, and he guessed the truth in a moment. "Was it really your own, and quite impromptu?" he asked, with one of his sharp glances.



She met his eyes for a moment, and then dropped them with a fresh embarrassment. "It was a question from one of the children that started me off, and I really couldn't help it," she said in a low voice.

The twelve o'clock bell struck at that moment, and the noise of the pupils putting away their books called her attention back to her little school. She dismissed them with a cheerful good by, which did not, however, prevent several of the children from lingering to ask if she were coming back the next day, and somehow her confident assurance that the regular teacher would be in her place did not seem to have an exhilarating effect upon their spirits.

When they were all gone, she turned again to Mr. Hermon, who was still standing in the room. She had forgotten, in the excitement of the last two hours, the purpose which had taken her to his desk that morning, but it came back to her now with a sudden remembrance.

"Mr. Hermon," she said, the quick, bright color leaping into her face again, "when I stopped to speak with you after class, I meant to ask you a question. I meant to ask if I might come to



see you for a little while this evening. You spoke to me once about coming, and I have wanted to ever since."

"Well, and why haven't you done it?" he demanded, smiling and frowning at her in the same moment; "if I remember correctly, it was some time ago that I laid that injunction upon you, and you ought to have minded me better than this."

"I did go one evening," she said, "but you were away, and —"

"Well, I shall be at home this evening," he interrupted, with one of his imperative little nods, "and I shall expect to see you without fail. It's high time you and I were getting better acquainted."

He opened the door again, and she walked by his side back to the front of the Academy. For her own part, she had not quite recovered from the embarrassment of his hearing that little story which was only designed for the ears of the children, but she consoled herself with the thought that he could not have been much displeased, or he would not treat her now with such special kindness.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### IN MR. HERMON'S STUDY.

THE lessons for the next day were learned before supper that evening, and at as early an hour as propriety would allow, Sue set off for the long-anticipated call. Bertha did not offer to accompany her. She had an instinctive feeling that Sue would rather make that call alone, but even she, shrewd reader of her sister's heart as she was, had no idea how that heart throbbed with excitement and longing as its owner walked towards Mr. Hermon's house. Sue could not have explained it herself, but the eccentric, irascible principal of Merton Academy had somehow roused all her latent capacity for hero-worship, and become himself the hero at whose shrine she worshipped with a devotion of a silent but most intense sort.

He lived several blocks beyond the Academy, in a white, old-fashioned house, well back from the street, with porch and pillars of the Grecian



order. It was a house which Sue had inwardly pronounced just the thing for Mr. Hermon the first time she saw it, and to-night, with the certainty that he was inside, somewhere behind those twinkling windows, the building seemed more than ever to have a quality identical with his own. A sweet-faced lady, hardly yet in middle life, answered Sue's ring, and the girl was not wrong in guessing her to be the unmarried niece who, for some years, had acted as the keeper of Mr. Hermon's house. Mr. Hermon himself had no family. Death had long ago robbed him of his wife and only child, and it was whispered, by those who knew him best, that the absorption of his life in Merton Academy was largely due to the grief for which he could find no solace but work, even with the lengthening years.

He was in his study, and to this Sue was conducted at once by the sweet-faced lady, who seemed to know that she was expected, though the energy with which she knocked at his door, alarmed the young visitor for a moment with the fear that he was being aroused out of a profound sleep. His own appearance in response, however, smiling and wide awake, reassured her.



“Ah,” he said, beaming upon Sue. “Come in! come in! I hoped you’d be here early. I’m glad you didn’t forget.”

Forget! If he had known how little possibility there was of her forgetting! Sue smiled inwardly at the thought, and took the great leather chair before the fire which he offered her, feeling altogether speechless.

He had evidently been writing, for his pen was in his hand, and he remarked the next moment, throwing himself into a place at the table, “Now it’ll take me about three minutes to finish this letter; after that we’ll talk.”

He seemed as unconscious of her presence the next instant as if she had not been there, and Sue (for that very reason, perhaps) began to feel herself quite at home. The room itself conduced to the feeling. It was lined with books. Never except in the library at the Academy had she seen so many in one place, but the rows, which were there compact from floor to ceiling, stopped here midway of the wall, and above them were engravings of famous men and places, sculpture in photographs, and occasionally a marble bust or bit of bronze. The furniture was mostly in leather, of



the easiest pattern, and worn to an expression of the most complete friendliness, and the final touch of good cheer was given to the room by an open fire which curled in an enchanting manner round a hickory log in a wide, old-fashioned fireplace at one corner.

Sue's glance, starting with this fire, wandered back to it in a slow circuit of delight, and she said to herself, that if ever that castle in Spain, of which she dreamed sometimes, took tangible shape, its dearest room should be a place exactly like this. She had time now to lift her eyes above the fire, and she started the next moment at the sight of the picture which hung there, in the ruddy light. It was the same which she had seen in the poet's corner at the library, that wonderful young face, with the sweet, serious smile, and the deep, beautiful eyes, which seemed always to follow and impel one to his best and truest thought. She had wondered over it from the first, but no one whom she had yet asked had been able to tell her whose picture it was, and she reflected, with a sudden delight, that now at last she could learn from Mr. Hermon himself.

The three minutes were up, but he was still



writing, at what seemed to her a lightning speed, with his pen stuck between his second and third fingers, and his head bent over his paper. She liked to watch him, and she almost laughed outright with pleasure, when he smiled once, in evident glee over something he was putting down. It was a trick of her own, for which she had been subjected to no little ridicule on the part of her sisters, but she decided she would never be ashamed of it again. Why indeed should not one smile as cordially at the bright idea which comes into his own head as at that which comes into somebody's else? Modesty? Pshaw, mere affectation! She would have none of it after this.

She had just held this little colloquy with herself when Mr. Hermon paused in his writing. The next instant, somewhat to her horror, he wiped his pen on the lining of his gown. The lining fortunately was black, and it occurred to Sue that if he was in the habit of utilizing it for such purposes the color might have been selected with design. The next instant he was wheeling his chair toward hers.

“Well, are you getting tired of waiting?” he asked, smiling. “I never like to lay down a letter



till I have finished it. Tying knots in the thread of one's discourse is always bad enough, but it spoils a letter. Don't break it off till you come to the end. That's my rule."

He clasped his great hands behind his head, leaned back, and regarding her with a fatherly smile, changed the subject with a, "Well, how goes the Latin?"

"Oh, I don't have any trouble with it nowadays,—at least, not any worth mentioning," she said quickly. "I really think I could get longer lessons than you give us."

He nodded approvingly. "I knew it would be easy enough for you before the term was over," he said; and he added gravely, "That's the 'exceeding great reward' for doing one's work faithfully. It increases the power of the doer. It makes it possible for him to do constantly more and more."

It was not a new idea, but somehow Sue heard it with a peculiar thrill. She mused over it without attempting a reply, and for a minute Mr. Hermon too seemed lost in the train of his own thinking. It was she who interrupted the silence suddenly with the question over which she had so lately been puzzling.



"Mr. Hermon," she said in her quick, eager way, "will you please tell me whose picture that is over the mantel? The same picture is in the poets' corner at the library, and I've wondered over it so many times."

He started, and looked at her for a moment with an expression so sharp and almost painful in its surprise that she felt disturbed, she scarcely knew why, and added with a little flush, "It seems as if I ought to know myself who it is, for I'm sure it must be one of the poets, but I can't remember seeing it in any book." She hesitated a moment and added, "It is such a beautiful face! It seems as if I could never look at it enough."

Her eyes were on the picture as she spoke, but she turned them, as she ended, towards Mr. Hermon, and was shocked at the change which had come over his face. It had broken suddenly into an agony of grief and inexpressible longing.

"Yes," he said, seeming to speak not so much to her as to himself, "he *was* a poet, but one whose name the world had yet to learn." He gazed at the picture as if oblivious of everything else, and in a strange, low voice murmured:



“Oh, child of Paradise,  
Boy who made dear his father's home,  
In whose deep eyes  
Men read the welfare of the years to come,  
I am too much bereft.  
The world dishonored thou hast left,  
Oh, richest fortune sourly crossed!  
Born for the future, to the future lost!”

She but half understood the lines, but she understood now, and with a shock of intense surprise, that the picture could be of no other than that only child, the boy whom she had heard mentioned as lost to his father so long before. The tears rushed suddenly into her eyes, and she caught her breath with a sob she could not repress.

“Oh,” she said, as the man beside her turned at the sound, “I never dreamed when I asked the question —”

“No, no,” he interrupted, the anguish of his face melting into a look inexpressibly sad and tender; “you need not regret your question. There is no reason why I should not tell you that the face is the face of my son. He had but a few years here, less than you have had already, but our lives had woven themselves so completely to-



gether, that there was nothing left me worth the name when he died. He was a rare, high soul, a poet soul, and if he had lived—" he broke suddenly off with the old sharp note of anguish in his voice, then added solemnly, "But he *does* live. Why do I speak of him as dead?"

For a few minutes there was only the crackling of the flames round the hickory log to disturb the silence, then Mr. Hermon spoke again, and the fatherly smile had come back to his eyes, as he said, drawing his chair closer to hers, "Tell me all about your coming to the Academy; I fancy it was not quite the easy thing for you that it is for some of the students."

Sue's face lighted, and her eyes shone through her tears. Her heart had gone out to him so completely in the last few minutes that there was no sense of restraint left, and as easily, more easily perhaps, than she could have talked to her own father, she told him how the hope of coming had lain in her heart and Bertha's long before it had shaped itself into a tangible plan; how they had worked in the corset shop to earn the money, and of the economies and self-denials which had been practised by all the circle at home to aid



their purpose. An interested question now and then drew her on, and Mr. Theophilus Hermon would not have been the discerning man he was if he had not understood, long before the story was finished, just what sort of a girl Sue Orcutt was, and what sort of a home and influences were back of her.

"Well, and has it paid?" he asked with a quiet smile, as she ended.

"Paid!" she exclaimed, looking at him almost reproachfully. "Oh, a thousand times over. People say there is more pleasure in anticipating things than in actually having them, but it isn't true. Oh, I know it isn't true. I never expected to enjoy the term one half as much as I really have. Why, Mr. Hermon, just to have been in your class alone has been better than all I ever dreamed of!"

It is hardly possible that Mr. Theophilus Hermon was ignorant of the very remarkable quality of his own teaching, but the most eminent instructor in the world must have felt a thrill of pleasure at a tribute of appreciation given in such a tone, and with such a look as shone in Sue Orcutt's eyes at that moment. Perhaps, indeed,



the principal of Merton Academy valued it the more that it was the honest, unsought tribute of one whose insight had been gained through her own simple faithfulness as a pupil.

She was silent for a moment, from mere fullness of heart, then she added, her voice dropping a little, "The only thing that keeps me from being perfectly happy here, is the thought that I can only stay one term."

"Is that quite settled?" he exclaimed, leaning forward and looking at her with an expression almost as eager as her own had been. "Would it be impossible if special accommodation should be given as to tuition? In the economical way you live, your expenses must be light, and your parents, who have your education so much at heart, would surely be willing to make further sacrifices for the sake of your staying longer. It would be a serious loss for you to stop now."

"Oh, father and mother are willing to do everything possible," cried Sue quickly, "but they couldn't spare the money, indeed they couldn't, with all the expenses that have to be met on the farm in spring! And the money that Bertha and I earned will be all gone. We shall have to stay



out and earn some more. It is the only way. But if we have good success, we can come back in the fall. I can stand anything for the sake of that."

She was thinking of the corset factory as she said the last words, and the prosaic round of work to which, for a time at least, she must devote her energies, if she were to provide herself with the means of coming back to Merton Academy. She had groaned the day before, when Bertha mentioned it, but the cheerful tone with which she herself alluded to it now would have done her sister good to hear.

Mr. Hermon rose from his chair and walked around the room with his hands behind his back and his eyes fixed musingly on the floor. Suddenly a new idea seemed to dawn upon him. He stopped short, threw back his head, and appeared to be eyeing it with a fixity which would surely have put any idea not well founded and grounded quite out of countenance.

"Miss Orcutt," he exclaimed, turning suddenly upon her, "what should you say to coming back next term as the teacher of the little school, the one you taught this morning? You know it is



only in session half a day, and as no work is required of the teacher out of school, you could, without doubt, keep up one or two of your studies and retain your connection with the Academy. The pay, though small, would cover your expenses. It is never less than twenty dollars a month, and might be more," he added with a little smile, "if the teacher were very popular."

Sue caught her breath. The suggestion was an overwhelming one, yet after all not so overwhelming as the suggestion that she should act as a substitute had been that morning. To tell the truth, however, the thought of the little school was for the moment quite swallowed up in the thought of the opportunity for study which the position would offer.

"Oh, Mr. Hermon," she exclaimed, starting to her feet, "if I could do *that*! If I could just keep on in your Latin class, and have a little while every day in the library, it's all I would ask."

Her heart bounded for a moment with the joy of the thought, and then came the sobering remembrance that there were duties as well as privileges to be considered. Was she qualified to undertake



those duties? Was there any certainty that she could perform them well? She raised her eyes to Mr. Hermon's again, and they were big and dark now with the gravity of the question.

"But, Mr. Hermon," she said, "do you really think I'm fit for such a place as that? You know I never taught school except this morning, and of course that doesn't count for real teaching. Do you think—oh, do you truly think I could do the work?"

He had been watching her face for the last few moments, and the gleam in his eyes as she asked the question showed that it pleased him well.

"If I did *not* think you could do it, and do it well," he said very gravely, "you may be sure I should not propose it, much as I should like to find a way for you to remain in the Academy. And I confess that for my own sake, as well as yours, I should like to keep you among my pupils."

She could not speak for a moment in the wave of happiness that swept over her. But the happiness somehow carried with it a great humility, and the memory of her own shortcomings flashed upon her at that instant with uncommon clearness.



"I should like it, I should like it above all things," she burst out with a quiver in her voice, "but if you knew how many mistakes I make, and how forgetful—oh, how dreadfully forgetful—I am sometimes, I'm afraid you wouldn't feel about it as you do now."

He sat down in his chair again, and for a moment looked searchingly into her eyes. "What sort of things do you forget?" he asked quietly. "Do you forget how you felt when you were a child yourself? Do you forget to be kindly and patient with the mistakes of those who have not had as long to try as you have?"

"God knows," he exclaimed, breaking off suddenly with a quick nervous accent in his voice, "we all forget too often, we teachers, who above all others ought to remember, but I will answer for it that that is not the kind of thing you are most inclined to forget. You will make mistakes of course. We all do. It is the way we have to learn. But we need not make the same mistakes over and over, and I do not think you will. You will do your honest best, and try to make it better every day. I am not afraid to trust you."

Her heart was too full to attempt a reply, and



he went on after a moment in a lighter tone, "Of course we can't settle it to-night. You must consult your parents, and I the patrons of the school. You are rather young, and some of them may remind me of that fact, but I've known teachers no older than you who have done good work, and I think your success this morning will count for something. It is possible — of course it is possible — that there may be some one else in view. Miss Dearborn has already signified her intention of leaving the school at the end of the term, but, so far as I know, no successor has been mentioned. Well, we must think it all over and see what we can do. I have a feeling that the way will open for you to stay another term at Merton Academy."

"I can't tell you how much I thank you for wanting me to be here," said Sue.

The words were flat and inadequate. She knew it, but somehow there were no others at her command that seemed any better. Perhaps, however, if she could have made that glowing little speech, full of such gratitude and devotion as pupil had never breathed to teacher before, which she felt that the occasion really demanded, he would not



have heard her. His head had dropped back on his chair with that look of preoccupation which she knew so well. She felt that it was time now to go home, and she would have risen the next moment, had there not come just then a sound of steps on the stairs,—young, rushing steps,—followed the next instant by a sharp, double rap at the door.

“Why, that must be Dick,” said Mr. Hermon, rousing himself, and he added briskly, “Come in!”



## CHAPTER XIX.

### DICK HIMSELF.

IT certainly was Dick. Probably no one else came up to Mr. Hermon's study in quite so noisy a fashion. He scarcely waited for the invitation to come in, but threw open the door and stepped across the threshold with the air of one who felt himself quite at home. His bright young face was all aglow with the tingle of the keen winter air, and there was a sharp little snapping between his hand and Mr. Hermon's, as the latter rose to greet him.

"Ah, you young rascal," he said, drawing back the next moment, "what a shock you always give me, when you come bursting in this way!"

Dick laughed. "I don't see how I can help it, unless you refuse to shake hands with me; and I really hope you won't do that, Mr. Hermon."

There was something boyishly affectionate in his easy, light-hearted manner; and Sue could not help thinking that whatever tortures Dick Julian



might inflict upon his instructor in the classroom, it must be worth something to the lonely old man to be looked in upon of an evening by a cheery young fellow, who carried with him such an air of abounding life. He did not offer to shake hands with Sue, but he had given her a quick, pleased little nod at the moment of entering, and she had returned it with a cordial smile, though she could not help wishing that she had said her good by before his coming. It was impossible to say it now, for he dashed at once into a matter of news, which he had apparently just received in a letter from home, and Mr. Hermon's attention was so completely absorbed, that interruption was out of the question.

"I thought I must come in, and tell you about it," Dick ended gayly, "though I knew 'twas pretty late, and I hadn't but a minute to stay. The fact is," he added, looking rather virtuous, "I've been up at Colby's all the evening, working on the Cicero for to-morrow."

"H'm!" grunted Mr. Hermon, "and hatching out an uncommon number of absurdities between you, I'll warrant. You do better, each of you, to settle down to work by yourself. That's the



only way to get into the marrow of a thing. I'll venture to say," he added, with a benignant glance at Sue, "that Miss Orcutt doesn't run around asking anybody to study the lesson with her."

"I should like to know who the lucky fellow is, if she does," laughed Dick; and Mr. Hermon, remembering that she was the only girl in the class, laughed too.

Sue rose, blushing of course, but feeling that her opportunity had come. "Mr. Hermon," she said, "I want to bid you good night," and she added, with a little quiver in her voice, "I shall never forget this evening."

He smiled, and shut her hand into his with a quick, strong pressure. "Good night, my dear," he said; "I shall not forget it, either, nor that plan of ours for next term."

Dick had risen, too, and was twirling his seal-skin cap in his hands. "What, so soon, Dick?" said Mr. Hermon, with a glance of surprise.

"Yes, I believe I'd better," said the boy; and he added boldly, "I'm going Miss Orcutt's way, and perhaps she'll let me see her home."

"Oh, in that cause I'll let you off," said Mr.



Hermon, and he included them both in so benevolent a smile, that Sue could not help giving Dick another, and adding, "Thank you," in her pleasantest tone.

"Well," said the boy, when they were fairly out of doors, "so you really plucked up courage to come! Did you find it as much of an ordeal as you expected?"

"Ordeal!" repeated Sue. "It was heavenly. I never imagined anything like it."

Dick looked at his companion with an amused smile. He quite enjoyed dropping into Mr. Hermon's study himself; but he could not honestly say that his feelings had ever carried him as far as this.

"I knew he was the grandest man in the world," Sue went on, in an ecstasy, which she did not try to smother; "but I had no idea he was so kind, so interested in everything one did or tried to do, and so anxious to help. He asked me all about our coming to Merton, and how we had enjoyed being here; and when I told him we could only stay one term, he seemed as sorry as if it meant something to him personally. And then,—oh, it seems as if I must have been



dreaming,—he suggested that perhaps I could stay as teacher of the little school, and that would give me a chance to go on with my studies at the same time.”

Dick gave a low, astonished whistle. From his point of view it was simply impossible to understand what such a proposal meant to a girl like Sue Orcutt.

She caught the note of surprise, and added quickly, “I don’t wonder you’re amazed. I was myself. I never taught school, and it doesn’t seem as if I were fit for such a position. I told him so, too, but he said he’d trust me.”

“Oh, I don’t mean that,” said Dick, recovering himself. “You’ll get along with that part all right. I think myself ’twould be a regular picnic for the children. But the *work* is what I’m thinking of. It’s bad enough to do the studying one has to, but to teach school into the bargain! Seems to me that’s doubling things up with a vengeance.”

“But if ’twas the only chance of going on with your studying at all!” exclaimed Sue, “perhaps you wouldn’t mind the doubling up *then*.”

“I’m afraid I should,” said Dick grimly. “In



fact, I think I should swear off altogether. But I know how you feel about getting an education, and I suppose that makes a difference."

"Yes," responded Sue quietly, "that makes a difference." She was silent a moment, then with a thrill in her voice said, "Mr. Hermon understands it. He knew what 'twould mean to me to stay, and I never, never can thank him enough for wanting me to have the chance. Don't you think 'twas wonderfully good in him?"

"Well, yes, 'twas good, of course," admitted Dick, in a tone which seemed to Sue exasperatingly cool. "He does take a tremendous interest in helping scholars get ahead, that's certain. But I can tell you, it wasn't all pure, unadulterated benevolence on his part *this* time. He's come to depend on you, and 'twould really go hard with him to lose you out of the class."

Sue thought of that word of his, which had almost melted her heart with happiness, about wanting to keep her among his pupils, and made no reply except by one of those blushes which rose in her face so easily.

"That's a fact," pursued Dick, "your way of translating is after his own heart, and then he's



got into the habit of looking right down into your corner every time he says a good thing. He knows you take it in, and he has some doubts about the rest of us. His stories too—it gives him a chance to get off all the old ones with telling effect. That anecdote, now, about Daniel Webster, or some other great man, who reproved the reporter for making him say ‘penetrate,’ when he really said ‘pierce’—he’s pointed a moral on using short words, with that story, ever since I’ve been at Merton, but the way you looked when he told it this morning made him think ’twas a brand-new thing.” He laughed in his light, merry way, and added, “I tell you he thinks a sight of you, and we all know it.”

It was in Sue’s heart to say that he could not think a millionth part as much of her as she did of him, but there was a sacredness about her feeling for Mr. Hermon which somehow made it impossible to say it, and she remarked instead, rather abruptly:

“Do you know, I got the idea, before I came, that he liked boys better than girls, at least that he’d rather have them here as students.”

“Well, I guess that depends on the kind of



boys they are and the kind of girls," said Dick gayly. "He'd like anybody who went into things the way you do."

It occurred to Sue at this point that she herself had really been talked about quite long enough, and she turned the conversation suddenly to a discussion of Mr. Hermon's study, a theme on which she grew fairly eloquent, with Dick in full agreement, especially as to the charms of the open fire and the big easy chairs.

By the time they had finished, they had almost reached Deacon Porter's. The lights were out in the front of the house, but there was a pleasant glow from the low windows in the ell, and Sue, looking up at them, caught her breath with a happy little sigh. "Oh," she exclaimed, "I've thought so many times lately how soon we should have to give up those rooms to somebody else, and now perhaps we shall be in them ourselves for a whole term longer!"

"You needn't have a bit of doubt of it," said Dick warmly. "If Mr. Hermon's got that scheme in his head about your having the little school, he'll put it through, and not let the grass grow under his feet either."



He looked up at the windows himself for a minute, then said reflectively, "I always thought it must be awfully jolly boarding one's self. I've had a notion sometimes that I'd go into it myself if I could get some fellow that knew how to go in with me."

Sue laughed. "I don't believe you'd like it," she said.

"Why not?" demanded Dick. "I camped out for a week once, and I never had such fun in my life. To be sure," he added with a tone of one who wished to look at the question fairly, and on all sides, "it might be rather monotonous if you had to put in the greater part of your time doing housework, but I should think a body could stack up the dishes as an ordinary thing, and get some woman, who wanted to turn an honest penny, to come in and wash up the whole batch once a week, and give the beds a shaking. I think myself there's too much fuss made over housekeeping."

He suggested these truly Bohemian ideas with a gravity of tone which amused Sue vastly, then went on, "But the part I should like best would be making out my own bill of fare. When you're



boarding with other folks, you know, you have to take baked beans, and dried beef, and codfish, just as often as your landlady sees fit to bring them on; but if you were boarding yourself, you could change all that, and have chicken and dumpling every day, if you liked."

"Perhaps you wouldn't have them at all, if you boarded yourself," laughed Sue. "That is, if you did it, as most of us do, for the sake of economy."

"Well, I shouldn't go into it for that so much," said Dick (he was always modest over the fact of having plenty of money), "but for the 'glorious privilege of being independent,' you know."

He flattered himself that this was rather a neat turn, and being a little afraid that his companion, who was so much better posted on the hymn book than the British poets, might not recognize it, added, "That's what Burns said, you know. I always did like Burns."

"I like him too," said Sue eagerly, "though I never had a chance to read anything of his till the other day in the library. Which poem has that expression in it?"

It occurred to Dick that a little learning really



was a dangerous thing, especially if one attempted to air it. But there was no help for him now. "Well, I'm not quite sure; maybe it's Tam o' Shanter," he said, quaking inwardly, and Sue, whose acquaintance with Burns did not include that particular poem, received the statement without further question.

They had reached the gate now, and Dick held it open for her to pass through. Possibly he hoped she might ask him to come in, but it never once occurred to her to do so. She thanked him, however, a second time for coming home with her, and left him with so warm a good night that no sensible boy could have considered himself snubbed.

The door was open at the head of the stairs, and the gleam of the student lamp lighted her to the rooms above. Bertha, however, had already retired. Sue stole into the dim little bedroom and found her fast asleep. For a moment she wanted to wake her, and tell her of the new hope which might mean so much to them both, but she remembered that her sister had spoken of being very tired earlier in the evening, and refrained. Besides, it was somehow pleasant to sit



there in the stillness alone with her own happiness. It was almost too deep for words, and for the second time since coming to Merton, Sue wondered whether she had not somehow slipped into Heaven without knowing it.



## CHAPTER XX.

### THE QUESTION OF SUE'S FUTURE IS UNDER DISCUSSION.

DICK JULIAN was quite right in thinking that Mr. Hermon would not let the grass grow or (to use a figure better adapted to the season) the snow melt under his feet in his efforts to realize for Sue the hope he had suggested on that memorable evening. He was undoubtedly one of the Children of Light, but none of the children of this world could work more wisely than he in the carrying out of a pet scheme. A few mornings later he paid a visit to the little school, and after a short conversation with the teacher, addressed himself to the pupils on this wise:

“Children, I presume you know that Miss Dearborn will not be with you after this term. Now how would you like to have for your next teacher the young lady who was here a few mornings ago? The one,” he added cunningly, “who told you the new story about Silverhair and the Bears?”



Every child in the room raised his hand in an instant, several, indeed, lifting both, and one or two bringing them together above their heads with a resounding clap.

"That will do," said Mr. Hermon, smiling at them in his most benignant manner. "I shall see your parents about this very soon, but you can tell them what you know about Miss Orcutt, and how you liked her, without waiting for me."

There was no doubt that his suggestion was carried out to the letter. The parents on whom he called within the next few days were remarkably well posted as to the peculiar fitness of Miss Susan Orcutt for the post.

"I suppose she worked up that story on purpose to win the hearts of the children," said one of the mothers, an influential person, on whom Mr. Hermon had thought it well to call first. "It was a clever stroke, but of course she couldn't keep up that sort of thing if she went in there for regular work."

Mr. Hermon looked amused. "She had no more idea of being asked to teach that school than I have," he said. "But it shows what she can do in an emergency. She's a girl of resources."



"But I understand she's very young," said the lady politely, "and that she's never taught in her life. Of course," she added quickly, "there has to be a first time for everything. But in a school like the little Academy we naturally want some one who has had experience and is posted in the latest systems of education."

"The latest systems!" quoth Mr. Hermon, beginning to look dangerous. "I'd give more for one live teacher, with an eye in her head and a little downright enthusiasm for her work, than all the cut and dried *systems* that ever were invented."

The lady laughed. Every one in Merton knew the consequences of arousing Mr. Hermon on certain phases of modern education, and she had no idea of engaging in a tilt with him that morning.

"So you really think Miss Orcutt has the qualities that go to make a first-class teacher?" she asked soothingly.

"I think," said Mr. Hermon, with returning calmness, "that she would undertake the work with an uncommon desire to do her duty, and that she has too much good sense and good feeling to make many mistakes as to what that duty really is. I think also that she has two



qualities, invaluable in a teacher for children, — enthusiasm and imagination. She is young, as you say; but she would at least bring to her work an amount of courage, and a freshness of feeling, in which age and experience are sometimes sadly wanting.”

“It is certainly in her favor that she has won your confidence so completely,” said the lady; “but I understand she would go on with her studies in the Academy. Isn’t that a little — just a little — in the line of serving two masters?”

“Perhaps so,” said Mr. Hermon, with a quick, upward jerk of his head; “I wish with all my heart that she need only devote herself to one, and that one Merton Academy. However, I cannot see that there need be any conflict between her duties. The two masters are not hostile, and I find no reason why she should not render honest service to both. I was myself a tutor in college during nearly all the time I was a student there; and I do not remember that any complaints were ever made of my work.”

The lady leaned back in her chair, with the air of one who felt herself completely vanquished. “Now, Mr. Hermon,” she said, with her brightest



smile, "if you mean to intimate that Miss Orcutt's gifts are in the least like yours, you know very well that the argument is ended. I did think of suggesting a graduate of a Normal School for our next teacher, but I assure you I shall not do it. With you and the children all so ardently in favor of this young person I certainly think the matter should be considered settled."

It really was settled, so far as Mr. Hermon and the patrons of the school were concerned, but there was still a good deal of thinking and talking to be done by the Orcutt family. Sue had despatched a letter at once to her father and mother, telling them of the opportunity which might be hers, and dutifully leaving the question of its acceptance to their judgment and decision. The answer she knew would not be long delayed, and pending its arrival there was more than one consultation in the attic chambers.

Bertha had been, if possible, more surprised at Mr. Hermon's proposal than Sue herself; for the latter, in reporting her morning's experience in the little school, had made nothing of her success, and Bertha could only attribute Mr. Hermon's action to his personal interest in her sister, and



some belief on his part (which she did not altogether share) that the girl who was so good a pupil would be an equally good teacher. It was the little dressmaker who, in her next visit to the room, really threw the first light on the puzzling question.

“Why, Sue just took those children by storm, and they’re all wild to have her for their teacher next term,” she declared, when Bertha, in Sue’s absence from the room, introduced the subject. “I must say,” she added candidly, “that I shouldn’t have picked out Sue, half as quick as I should you, for such a position as that ; but Mr. Hermon appears to be just as eager for it as the children are, and I’ll take his opinion in a matter of that kind every time. He’s a born teacher himself, and the way he dives into people and finds out what they’re good for is something marvellous.

“Well,” she continued, turning to the girl herself, who entered at that moment, “I hear you’re a candidate for the little school at the Academy. Don’t you think that’s rather presumptuous on your part, young woman?”

“No,” said Sue, meeting the twinkle in Miss Graham’s eyes with one of its own sort ; “it’s



modesty, not presumption, that ails me. Mr. Hermon is every bit responsible for the plan, and I have such respect for his opinion that I couldn't think of setting up my own in opposition. He said he'd trust me, and now I propose to trust myself."

"That's good," said Miss Graham, with an approving nod, and then she added cordially, "Well, I'm real glad you're going to have it. Of course Mr. Hermon will carry his point if he's set his heart upon it, and I've not a bit more doubt than he has that you'll make a success of it."

"I think Bertha has," said Sue, glancing rather ruefully at her sister, "and I'm afraid the folks at home will feel the same way. The trouble is they know me so well."

"It's the case of the prophet without honor in his own country, my dear," said the little dress-maker, "and no great blame to the countrymen either. We can't look at things fairly when they're too close to us, you know. We have to get the right perspective to see anything great."

"Such as an unfledged primary teacher," interposed Sue.

Bertha joined in the smile that followed. Then



she said, in her perfectly straightforward way, "I *have* felt a little anxious about your taking that position, Sue; I won't deny it. But nobody knows better than I what splendid things you can do, when you really put your heart into doing them."

Sue breathed a soft little sigh. "I know what you're thinking of," she said. "You're afraid I shall get so wrapped up in other things that I shall neglect my work. I know I'm a miserable sinner in that respect, and am always leaving undone the things I ought to do, especially when there's a generous soul like yourself ready to do them in my place, without saying a word. But if I really get that little school, I mean to give my mind to it in dead earnest for half the day, and perhaps I shan't do as badly as you think."

"It's a good thing for you that it comes in the morning," said Miss Graham; and then she asked briskly, "How much do you get for it? I mean what's the consideration in actual hard cash?"

"Twenty dollars a month," said Sue promptly. "Mr. Hermon said I could count on that."

"H'm," grunted Miss Graham; "little enough, I should hope."



"And large enough, I'm sure," said Sue eagerly. "It will cover our expenses. We have not averaged as much as that this term."

"But *I* shall not be here," said Bertha, turning quietly to her sister. "You speak as if you were planning for us both."

"Why! why! Of course you will be here," gasped Sue; "I never thought of anything else."

"But I have, from the very first," said Bertha. "Do you really think I could be satisfied to live on your earnings, and have twice as much advantage from them as you were having yourself?"

"I'm sure I don't see what difference it makes who has the most advantage," cried Sue, fairly overwhelmed with surprise and distress. "If *you* can go to school all day instead of half a day, it's just so much the better. Oh, Bertha, you wouldn't be so mean as to stand back, just because it was *I*, instead of you, that was earning the money?"

"No, I wouldn't," said Bertha, flushing a little, "if that were the only reason. I could let you do this thing for me—" she hesitated a moment, then, with characteristic honesty, repeated, "I *think* I could let you, almost as willingly as I



would do it for you, if it were my chance instead of yours. But your earnings would not be really enough for us both, Sue, for father could not take the time to bring us supplies as he has this winter. Besides, mother needs one of us at home in the spring. Think how hard it would be for her if we were both away."

"But how could I get along without you?" protested Sue, almost sobbing. "It is you who have managed everything, and made it all a success. Mr. Hermon said there might be more than twenty dollars, and we will be more economical than ever. Perhaps we could even send a part of it home to pay for help. Oh, we will be so careful! Bertha, you *must* be here!"

"Just think," said the little dressmaker, trying to speak lightly, though her voice was a trifle shaky, "what the consequences might be of leaving Sue to her own devices. Consider the effect, on her constitution, of the pies she would make, and the effect on her purse of the investments in—"

"Now, Miss Graham!" protested Sue, and the laugh which rippled through the room at that moment was a relief to them all.



"But why should Sue board herself at all?" said Bertha quietly, when the laugh had died away. "If she is to do double duty, she ought, for her own sake, to be quite free from the work of housekeeping, and if we were to go on, living as we are now, she would feel that she ought to do as much as ever. No, Sue, no," she added, her clear blue eyes meeting her sister's with a look very tender and steady. "I've been thinking it all through, and I'm sure it wouldn't be best. You will have money enough to board in some good family, and that would be the better way. It would be the only fair way, generous as you are."

Sue covered her face with her hands. She honestly felt at that moment that all the happiness of being at Merton Academy would be lost for her if Bertha were not there, but her voice was not steady enough to say it, and wise, true-hearted Bertha would have known better than to believe it if she had.

It was Miss Graham who broke the silence. "Well," she said, with a little preliminary whisk of her handkerchief, "I always knew, Bertha Orcutt, that you were an uncommonly level-headed



girl, and I'm more convinced of it now than ever. You are exactly right, and Sue will see it herself before long.

"And now that we're in the line of planning, I have an idea too. I believe Mrs. Porter would board Sue, and let her keep these rooms just as they are. Then they'll be all ready for you both, when you come back in the fall, for you'll come, of course. Oh, I see how everything is going to be, and I've a good mind to dance a jig over it right now."

"You'd better wait till we get that letter from home," said Bertha discreetly. "And yet," she added, "I'm not much afraid it'll upset our plan, as far as Sue's staying is concerned."

She had no reason to be. The letter which came a few days later gave hearty consent to Sue's accepting the post of teacher, should the opportunity really be hers, and the view which Bertha had taken of the matter proved to be the one which the council at home had already adopted. Mrs. Orcutt was not an effusive woman, and if she felt elated over the honor which was contemplated for her second daughter, she did not disclose it. Neither did she express any doubt



of the girl's fitness for the position, on the score of youth and inexperience, but she wrote significantly, "I think you know, my dear child, that it will require your best energies to fill such a place, and you will need to 'watch and fight and pray' if you fill it well"; a passage which Sue read with a heightened color, and a devout determination to do her best.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE LAST DAYS.

THERE was but a small portion remaining now of the winter term at Merton Academy, and the days glided away so fast that, as Sue said, a body could scarcely wink at one before it was gone. She wondered sometimes how she would have felt if she had known they were actually to be her last in that happy place. Even with the knowledge that she was coming back, which Mr. Hermon very soon made definite, it was hard to let them go, and it was really Bertha who, with home and the corset factory before her, showed the more philosophic spirit in these closing days. They were unmarked by any great or surprising incidents, and the "Interview," with which the term ended, was perhaps the only event worthy of further mention.

It was a time-honored affair, this "Interview," as it was called, to which the last evening of the term was always devoted; and the time which the stu-



dents spent together, in easy chat, or in promenading about the assembly hall to the music of a mild orchestra, with a modest treat, and perhaps a little talk from Mr. Hermon thrown in, was, in the opinion of most of them, no mean occasion.

Sue and Bertha were there, of course, and there were few of their fellow-students who did not take pains to congratulate the one on her prospect of coming back, and express to the other their sincere regret that, for a time at least, she must be away. The dignified young senior seemed in particular to be much depressed over the latter circumstance, and Sue could not help thinking that her sister's face expressed rather more regret while talking with him on the subject, than she usually allowed to appear.

Dick Julian was there with Alma Lynn, but early in the evening he secured a promenade with Sue, in the course of which he laughingly informed her that it was he who "put Mr. Hermon up" to taking that vote among the children; and Sue, who had not heard before of the voting, was much interested.

"Of course," added Dick, who was really not given to exaggerating the importance of his own



services, "it didn't make any difference to speak of, but I thought the little kids could help the cause along, and save him some talking. He's tremendously pleased with the way it's come out. And so am I," he added frankly.

Probably if Sue could have spent the evening just as she liked, she would have employed a large part of it in conversation with Mr. Hermon; but he was always surrounded when she tried to approach him, and thinking of the days that were to come, and that evening of blessed memory when she sat in his study and talked and listened, with no one to interrupt, she felt that it would be selfish in her to claim many of these last moments. She had the satisfaction, however, of passing him cake and ice-cream, and this was worth something.

It was a simple, old-fashioned affair, this "Interview," and all the more so that its festivities ended at half-past ten o'clock. Mr. Hermon himself called the attention of the young people to the hour. "Scholars," he said, tapping vigorously on the table to check for a moment the stream of chatter, "it is growing late, and all of you, I know, have duties awaiting you in the morning. Some of you have trunks to pack and other preparations



to make for leaving town. It is pleasant to spend these last moments together, but we shall not escape the regret of parting by deferring it. Let us bid each other and the Academy good by, for a while, in a hearty round of Auld Lang Syne."

The orchestra struck up the familiar air, and though some voices quavered a little, it was a strong, deep chorus to which the old walls resounded. When it was ended, the company broke up; and before the clock on the church steeple struck eleven, the Academy was deserted and the lights were out.

It was the next day that the Orcutt girls went home. In spite of the dissipation of the night before, they were up early in the morning and getting everything briskly in readiness for departure. The idea that renters are in nowise responsible for the appearance of the quarters they leave behind had never dawned upon these old-fashioned roomers, and the "straightening up" to which the attic rooms were subjected was of the most thorough sort.

"Why, you're not leaving a thing for me to do after you're gone," said good Mrs. Porter, looking in, in the course of the forenoon, and observing



with amazement that Sue was polishing the windows and Bertha removing every speck from the pantry shelves.

“Well, I should think ’twas pretty mean if we did,” replied Sue, pausing for a moment in her work, and then renewing it with redoubled energy.

“Well, if you knew how I’ve had to dig out the corners after *some* roomers!” said the landlady significantly, and then she gave a little sigh, and said she wished she could keep the present incumbents to the end of her days.

The work was somewhat lightened for them, and very greatly lightened for the good deacon, their father, who appeared with the gray horse and the old “pung” just at noon, from the fact that most of the furniture they had brought with them was to remain for Sue during the following term. The cooking-utensils she could indeed spare, as she was henceforth to sit at the table of the Porters; and it is doubtful whether, with all her devotion to Bertha, she really felt much grief at seeing the pots and kettles stowed under the seat of the venerable old sleigh. There were a few supplies from the pantry to be taken home, but Bertha had managed things with so much



prudence that very little room was needed for the groceries which were to be added to the larder at the old farmhouse. In the cellar there was a larger remnant of the winter's store left, but this Deacon Orcutt promptly decided to leave in its place. "Why, we've got apples enough and all that sort of thing," he remarked to Deacon Porter, as, with lantern in hand, the latter assisted him in his work of inspection, "and there isn't a bit of need of lugging 'em home again. That is," he added, with a look of gentle inquiry, "if you can make any use of 'em here."

His companion lost no time in assuring him that the Porter family not only *could* make use of whatever in the line of vegetables their good friend chose to leave, but that they would come in "uncommonly handy"; and the heartiness with which he said it would have destroyed any regrets on Deacon Orcutt's part (had he really had any) for the over-abundance with which he had supplied his daughters' table. He seemed, however, to feel a little disappointed that the young ladies' appetites had not more nearly reached his own estimate.

"Why, I thought they'd have used up all these



things and called for more," he said, turning a little heap of smooth, brown-jacketed potatoes with his foot as he spoke. "'Pears to me they haven't eaten as hearty as they do at home."

"Well, I guess they hain't suffered any," said Deacon Porter; and he added, with the accent of one who felt a personal interest in the appearance of his lodgers, "I must say I never saw two girls look better at the end of a season than they do. Mother and I were speaking of it only the other day, how well and hearty they look."

"Well, I think myself there's nothing to complain of in their looks," admitted their father; and he added, with a confidential chuckle, "The fact is, Deacon, they're a pretty good-looking pair of girls most any time in the year."

"That's a fact," responded the other cordially. He had a subtle divination of his brother's weak point, and he added with increasing unction, "I don't blame you a mite, Deacon, not a mite, for being proud of those girls of yours. We've had students in our house, boarders and roomers, for the last twenty years, but we never had any that we liked as well as we like them; never. They hain't made a spec o' trouble all winter. Mother



was saying, just last night, that she never did see a couple o' girls that were so comfortable to get along with, so pleasant and sensible, you know, day in and day out."

Deacon Orcutt's face glowed in the dim light of the cellar like a veritable jack-o'-lantern, and he wished he had brought an extra bushel of Roxbury russets to add to those in the bottom of the barrel.

"I knew that's what you'd say about 'em!" he exclaimed. "I came near telling you what sort of girls they were when I engaged the rooms, but I knew you'd find out for yourself before the winter was over."

The good man of the house might have reminded him that he really did enlarge on that point, at the time referred to, with considerable fulness, but with delicate consideration he refrained.

"Well, we have found out sure enough," he said with an emphatic nod, "and we ain't the only ones in Merton neither. I tell you they've made a record for themselves at the Academy."

"I guess that must be so," said Deacon Orcutt, with an amusing effort to conceal the paternal



pride in his voice with a judicial accent. "We were a little surprised when Susan wrote us about the offer she'd had to teach that school. And yet," he added briskly, detecting in his companion's face that he too had shared the feeling, "I don't know as 'twas anything to be surprised at either. Sue isn't as old as some, but she's got a sight of gumption, and when she really gives her mind to a thing" (it was impossible not to fall into the family phrase at this point), "I never knew her to fail of putting it through in first-class style. The fact is," he added, with the tone of one who feels that he is getting a large subject into a nutshell, "that's the way their mother does things, and the girls take after her, every one of 'em."

It was well for the good man that he had this opportunity of freeing his mind on the subject of his daughters in the privacy of the cellar, otherwise he might have felt impelled to do it in a more public place, where there would have been no small danger of his being impeded by admonishing glances from the girls themselves. As it was, he was able to turn his mind to other subjects for the rest of his short stay, and during the dinner, which Mrs. Porter had insisted on preparing for



them all, he was chiefly occupied in discussing with his brother deacon the spiritual condition of the churches to which they severally ministered.

If Miss Graham could only have shared the meal with them, it would have made the pleasure of the little party complete; and had it not been for the making of a wedding garment for which the owner could obviously not be asked to wait, she would probably have sacrificed this last day to seeing her young friends off. As it was, she took her farewell glimpse of them early in the morning, and added to her good by and blessing, a message for their mother, and a set of colored fashion plates for the little girls at home.

Not much time remained for the travellers when the meal was over. "I guess we shall have to do as the beggars' do,—eat and run," said Deacon Orcutt, pulling out his watch and noting with surprise that it was already past one o'clock.

And his host responded cordially, "That's all right, Deacon; that's all right! You've got a long ride before you, and we don't want you to stand on ceremony," to which his wife added, with a smile at the girls, "No, indeed! the sooner you



get home now, the better. I expect your mother and sisters will be on pins and needles till they see you coming."

It would seem as if no time were left for regrets in the bustle of these last few minutes; but when everything else had been said and done, the girls could not resist the impulse to steal up stairs for one more glimpse of those empty rooms. The silence, as of a place deserted, seemed to have fallen upon them already, and the consciousness that the winter at Merton Academy was really ended took possession of the sisters as it had not done before.

"It's a good time that we've had here together, Sue," said Bertha, breaking the silence, with a little quiver in her voice.

Sue could not speak. She drew closer to the window and looked off at the birch tree on the hill, which seemed now, in its eager pose, to be bidding them good by, as it had seemed to be giving them welcome on the day when they saw it first. Her eyes filled with tears, tears not so much of sorrow for the thing that was past as of sadness in the fact of its passing. There was pain in the thought that this chapter in the book



of her life, whose leaves could never turn back, was read through to the end.

“Ready, girls, ready!” It was their father’s voice calling from the foot of the stairs.

“All right,” they responded, and three minutes later they were in the old sleigh, waving good by to the Porters and the village of Merton.

The further incidents in the lives of the Orcutt Girls; the experiences of the following terms at the Academy; all these things will be told in the sequel to the present story which will be called

SUE ORCUTT.























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